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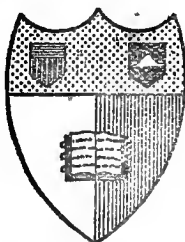
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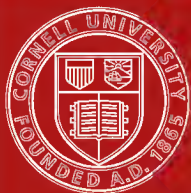


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“ ‘But I want to stay—Frank ’ ” (page 292).

The Voyage of the “Pulo Way.”]

[*Frontispiece.*

THE
VOYAGE OF THE "PULO WAY


*A RECORD OF
SOME STRANGE DOINGS AT SEA*

BY
CARLTON DAWE

AUTHOR OF "A BRIDE OF JAPAN," "CAPTAIN CASTLE,"
"YELLOW AND WHITE," &C.

ILLUSTRATED BY J. AMBROSE WALTON

LONDON
WARD, LOCK AND CO., LIMITED
WARWICK HOUSE, SALISBURY SQUARE, E.C.
NEW YORK AND MELBOURNE



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THE VOYAGE OF THE “PULO WAY”

CHAPTER I

CAPTAIN MACSHIEL DISLIKES PASSENGERS

THE eccentricity of Fate in weaving the web of human fortunes was never better exemplified than in my own life. There was I, a drudge in the office of Messrs. Latheson and Co., the well-known merchants of Hong Kong, receiving for my drudgery the not enormous stipend of twenty dollars a week. There was no future for me, or, at least, no future to which I looked forward with any degree of pleasure: nothing but ledgers, invoices, and the eternal scratching of pens! Sick or well, there was no escaping the dingy

desk or the high stool. To-day was just the same as yesterday; to-morrow would be the same as to-day; and so on through the years, until disease or drink brought the fooling to an end and Happy-Valley received me feet foremost.

Such, I say, was about all the prospect I had in life, when Fate, being in one of her whimsical moods, gave the wheel of fortune an erratic twist which shot me into the midst of a series of astounding adventures and completely changed the whole course of my life. How it happened, what those adventures were, and sundry other incidents connected with them, I will set down in the order in which they occurred, hoping that the singularity of my experiences may atone somewhat for my other deficiencies.

I had been in Messrs. Latheson's Hong Kong house for something over three years, and I have every reason to believe that during that time I had given my employers entire satisfaction. Indeed, our chief took rather a liking to me, and oftener honoured me with his confidence; and once, when the firm had effected an enormous deal in rice, I was sent to Saigon to superintend matters. It meant

nothing, of course, beyond a certain inward glow of satisfaction, for which my own ambitions were primarily responsible. Yet it took the keen edge off the surprise which was so soon to follow.

I remember rolling up to the office that morning feeling as though I would barter ten years of my life for six months' freedom. My head ached, my eyeballs throbbed; a nervous tremor for which I could not account most disagreeably affected my members. I clambered on to my stool, chewed my pen reflectively, and stared vacantly at the book before me; and even as I sat a-dreaming one of my brother drudges came up behind and caught me a thump on the back which sent me sprawling across the desk.

"Here, wake up!" he cried. "The chief wants to see you."

My nerves were in such a state that I could have shrieked aloud, but turning upon him with a sorrowful look, I made my way to the chief's private sanctum. What followed between us need not be set down in detail, though that interview was to prove of much consequence to me.

It seemed that the manager of our branch

house in Manila had been taken seriously ill; the doctors had ordered him rest and a complete change of air, and I was offered his post until such time as Heaven should restore him to health or take him from a wicked world. Should the last, presumably, regretful contingency occur, I was given to understand, providing sundry "ifs" were not insurmountable, that I might find the post a permanent one.

Needless to say I jumped at the offer, which, coming at such an opportune moment, seemed like a gift of the gods.

"And when shall I go, sir?"

"By the very first ship," said he. "It is imperative that you should lose as little time as possible. I am sorry for the breaking up of old ties, Ravensford; but perhaps the new ones will be more agreeable."

I knew well enough what he meant—one can't do much in a small place like Hong Kong and expect to keep it secret; but as I was glad enough to sever the old ties, which I knew were beginning to grip me closer, I swallowed the admonition with an excellent semblance of grace.

My next duty was to discover which was

the first ship to leave for Manila, and in less than an hour I learnt that the *Pulo Way*, a small steamer of about eight or nine hundred tons, was to sail on the morrow. I didn't much fancy small coasters of such tonnage, but with the given conditions I had neither the right nor the wish to be fastidious.

Upon calling at the agent's office I learnt that the *Pulo Way* was not in the habit of carrying passengers, or at least not passengers aft. Coolies she carried forward in the steerage, as do all the coasters; first-class passengers generally wait to choose their ship. But as I could not wait, the agent very kindly gave me a letter to the captain, saying he doubted not that worthy mariner would be able to fix me up.

Well, armed with this introduction, I made my way down to the jetty, hired a sampan, and very soon the *Pulo Way* hove in sight. Honestly, I cannot say that the first glimpse of her impressed me. She was an ideal ocean scavenger, even to her dirty funnel and her two black sticks of masts. Nor did a closer inspection prove more alluring. Here and there, at irregular intervals along her side, the paint had been rubbed off, and great blotches

of rust made the wretched little tub look dingier and dirtier than she really was. What was worse, as I ascended the rickety gangway, which swung dangerously free, my olfactory sense was assailed by a vile odour of pig. I was informed afterwards that her last cargo had been one of swine, and though she was supposed to be cleansed and fumigated, the scent clung fondly to her, nor was it exactly like that of the rose. Even now, when I shut my eyes and inhale deeply, I can smell the *Pulo Way*.

As I stepped on to the deck I found that portion of the ship in a considerable state of litter, though I should not forget to make due allowance for a vessel that is loading. Away forward a winch was going as if for dear life, and if there is a brain-breaking brute of a thing it is a steam-winch. Opposite me was the main hatch, and as I walked over to it and looked down I was greeted with such an odour of swine that I beat a hasty retreat aft.

Here rose a deck-house about twenty-five feet long and some ten or twelve feet broad, on each side of which was a door that swung outwards. Peeping through the door nearest

me, I saw that the house contained the companion-way which led into the saloon, and as there was no one about to guide me, I immediately began to descend the stairs. But I had not proceeded more than half a dozen steps when the sound of a man speaking arrested me.

“I’ll tell you what it is,” a rough voice was saying impressively, “it’s as safe as eggs ; and who’ll be a penny the wiser ? ”

The reply was whispered cautiously—so cautiously that I could not catch it. Then, fearing I might be hearing that which concerned me not, I coughed loudly, and descended forthwith.

The saloon was only a small one, about the size of the deck-house above, and contained a long, narrow table with benches on each side. At the head of this table, his back to me, sat a man ; on the bench to the right of him sat another. As I burst in upon them they sprang quickly to their feet ; while the smaller man—he who sat at the head of the table—hastily crumpled up a newspaper cutting and slipped it into his pocket. Seeing the evident annoyance my sudden entry had caused, I began to apologise.

"I beg your pardon, but can you tell me if Captain Macshiel is on board?"

"I am Captain Macshiel," replied the smaller man, in a dry, rasping voice, his eyes passing over me a quick, searching glance.

"I have a letter for you, sir."

He held out his hand and took the agent's note, which, after a moment or two of irresolution, and a furtive glance at his companion, he began to read. While he did so I stole a look round the saloon, and another at him and his companion. The saloon was plain enough, there being no room for superfluities aboard this boat. A rack with curved grooves for glasses swung above the table, and in those grooves half a dozen coloured wineglasses were ranged resplendent. On each side of the table were the cabins of the captain and his chief officers. There were no fittings or external decorations. All was economic and useful.

The two men were more interesting. Captain Macshiel was a narrow-chested individual, with a cadaverous, sun-dried face and a sharp, thin nose that bent curiously at the tip. He had a pale blue eye of surprising penetration,

and a rather ragged fringe of black hair, which, sprouting out of his neck, hedged his chin in a somewhat singular fashion. His companion was altogether different, being vast of stature, but somewhat clumsy, like a big man who has grown fat through laziness. There was little modesty in this person's demeanour, for he fairly stared me out of countenance. Nor was I at all complimented by this attention, for the man's face was extremely unprepossessing. Indeed, his heavy brows, thick, flat nose, and coarse mouth made him almost repulsive. I could imagine the thick, square jaw beneath his thick black beard; and I thought that much wisdom was displayed by him in showing as little as possible of his forbidding physiognomy.

The captain carefully folded the letter and laid it on the table before him. Then he looked up and down and round about, like a timid girl who dare not even glance into the ardent eyes of the young man by her side. Next he coughed affectedly, then trifled with the tip of his nose.

"Our agent informs me that you require a passage, Mr.—Mr."—referring to the letter—"Mr. Ravensford?"

"Yes, sir, that's so."

"The *Pulo Way* is hardly a passenger boat."

"So they tell me ; but there will be no other going for a week, and I must reach Manila with all despatch."

"I see."

At first I thought the man resented my unwarrantable intrusion, but a moment's reflection convinced me of the absurdity of such an idea. Your ordinary tramp skipper is, as a rule, only too proud to carry passengers. They add to his dignity, and fill him with a delightful sense of his own importance.

"I should be very pleased to take you, Mr. Ravensford," he began, in a dry voice—a voice that seemed to rake the words along his throat—"but I really have no proper accommodation aft. You see, we are only a tramp—a common little body that never soars so high as first-class passengers."

"Oh," I laughed, though I caught the sneer well enough, "I daresay we shall manage very well. It is absolutely necessary that I should go by the first ship."

Favouring me with another of his quick, curious glances, he fidgeted one hand in his

pocket, then the other, shuffled his feet about in an uncertain fashion, and then sank into his chair. As he did so his eyes sought those of the black-bearded gentleman on his right, and though it was but a momentary flash it set me thinking.

"True, I should be very proud to sail in your company," he continued, in his dry, sing-song fashion, which was half a sneer, "for you may be sure I have little congenial companionship on a boat like this. But the fact is, we were not built for passengers, and to say that I could make you comfortable would be to inveigle you on board under false pretences."

"You are much too scrupulous, Captain Macshiel. While I admire your honesty as a man, I do not approve of your discretion as a trader. I assure you it was not by cultivating such an extremely fine sense of justice that Messrs. Latheson built up their princely hong."

"Well," he muttered, a smile of much meaning playing round his mouth, "I have no wish to sail under false colours;" and he looked at big blackbeard as if for approval. But that worthy never opened his mouth. He

only nodded his big head solemnly and smiled with his eyes.

I knew well enough the man didn't want me, though why I could not imagine, as my presence on board could scarcely have increased his responsibility or affected him in any way. But I had made up my mind to go, and I let him know as much in no uncertain manner ; though an exhaustive apology for my seeming perversity naturally accompanied the declaration. Any accommodation would do for me—I had been accustomed to roughing it. He would find me a most exemplary passenger. He hummed and ha'ed and beat sundry inconsequent tattoos upon the table ; gave me to understand that his ship was one of the most pleasant on the coast, that she couldn't steam above ten knots, and that he frequently feared the first serious gale she encountered would send her to the bottom.

Now, all this was so much at variance with the usual boasting of the master mariner, who, as a rule, is intensely loyal to his command, that I was at a loss to comprehend it ; and had it not been necessary that I should get away, I would not have forced my

objectionable presence upon this piece of nautical fastidiousness. But I was not in a position to accept a rebuff, and so I let him see.

Now and again, while I was speaking, he turned interrogatively towards blackbeard, who did nothing but smile and shake his head; though once, turning suddenly upon that silent creature, I saw his eyes signal a look of assent. When next the captain spoke his cadaverous little face was wreathed with amiability.

"Well, well," said he, like one who gives way much against his will, "since you're so determined to come with us, we must see what we can do for you. No doubt we shall be able to fix you up somewhere."

"And when do you sail, captain?"

"Not later than ten to-morrow."

"Thanks. Good-day."

"Think you can catch us?"

"I'll try."

I shook hands cordially, nodded towards blackbeard, and made my way up on deck, not overpleased with myself or the captain of the *Pulo Way*. Near the main hatch, the odour of swine once more assailing me, I

quickly beat a retreat over the side, and felt relieved when my sampan pushed off. Truly Captain Macshiel had flattered me but little, which, after all, was nothing; but that he so obstinately refused to earn a few dollars was another and a more important matter. As for blackbeard, he never entered into my calculations at all.

CHAPTER II

SHIPMATES

TEN o'clock of the following morning saw me aboard the *Pulo Way*, amid the accustomed bustle of a ship preparing for sea. An hour later we had cleared the Ly-ee-moon Pass, and were steaming into the full swell of the ocean. Though the captain had professed his inability to provide me with any decent accommodation, I nevertheless found that one of the most commodious of the saloon cabins had been placed at my disposal, and this gave me a better opinion of Captain Macshiel. I fear my shore life had given me rather a liking for creature comforts. At all events, I had none of that desire for roughing it which some fellows seem to fancy.

I was the only saloon passenger, and as I wandered aimlessly about the decks I had

many opportunities of quizzing the officers and crew. The latter, as is usual on the coast boats, was Chinese, while Chinese greasers were to be seen skipping about among the pistons in the engine-room. Our mate, who was away forward cursing at the men, was a man of good breadth, with a flabby, yellow face and a thin ginger moustache which shot clean out above his mouth like a fringe of bristles. An old badge cap was stuck on the back of his head, showing a patch of ginger hair just under the peak, and every now and again, between his voluminous oaths, he turned to the side and expectorated freely sundry streams of tobacco juice.

But it was only at dinner that I saw how singular the mate really was, for in the middle of his wide, flabby face he had two dark, narrow slits of eyes which might have been fathered by a Chinaman. These lent to his big, yellow face such a curious aspect of malevolence and piggyish flabbiness that I could not bear to look at him. Which, I think, concerned him little; for he ate like a hog, never lifting his head from his plate, unless it was to grunt out a request that some one would pass him something.

The second mate was of an entirely different mould, broad of shoulder and elegant of build, with an extremely fine face, which, though more grimly honest than handsome, had in its dark, rugged outlines the beauty of strength and character. He was only a very young man, not more, I should say, than nine-and-twenty; yet his face showed signs of the wear and tear of many harder years.

I spoke to him after dinner, and found him, like so many sailors, extremely reserved—almost shy; but before we parted I had accepted an invitation to smoke a pipe with him in his room that evening, and, lonely as I was, I waxed curiously impatient until the time came round.

He received me with much civility, though with something of the dignity of an archbishop. But when we had warmed a little he fished out a bottle of whisky from his locker, and while he smoked some exceedingly black tobacco in an exceedingly big black pipe, we talked of Manila, the ship, and our fellow-voyagers. I soon learnt from him that this was his first voyage in the *Pulo Way*; and, though, like a wise man, he showed a commendable reticence whenever the captain's

name was mentioned, he was more communicative once the conversation turned to the chief mate. Indeed, he seemed to regard the latter with a considerable amount of distrust, and hinted in a mysterious sort of way at sundry curious conversations which that worthy had already had with him—hints which then seemed of such little moment that they slipped in at one ear and out at the other, but which, viewed in the light of after events, bear a most significant meaning.

Under the insidious influence of the whisky and the aforementioned black pipe, the second mate gradually began to thaw. His reserve vanished ; the dark, brooding face grew soft, until I thought there was never an ugly line upon it. Little by little he gave me a few particulars of himself, and how he came to join the *Pulo Way*—particulars of little moment, but which seemed interesting enough as he told them. Among other things I learnt that he was a native of the Hawkesbury district of New South Wales, which accounted for his great height and long, loose limbs ; for I had heard before of the splendid growth of the Hawkesbury men. I learnt, too, that his name was Hayling ; that off and on, he had

been to sea since he was fourteen, though there were few things to which he had not put his hand. In turn he had been gold-digger, sheep-farmer, bushman, telegraphic operator, and, I doubt not, much more than he cared to admit. Of gold-digging or sheep-farming I knew nothing; but I could talk to him of telegraphy, as I had once studied that latter-day marvel.

Your sailor is like that, extremely confidential if he thinks you are in sympathy with him; and though my new friend was not what one would call a talker, still a little genial interest in his doings paved the way for an excellent understanding. He had seen a good deal of life, and I am inclined to think the show had wearied him. At any rate, his face was older, harder, and more grimly set than a face of twenty-nine should be. From the bitter scraps of conversation dropped by him, I gathered that he had led a hard life, and that he saw little hope of bettering himself. Of course I smiled. Was not the non-fulfilment of youthful dreams one of the saddest reflections of after-life? No doubt my good friend often saw himself the master of a big mail-boat, a sort of perambulating salt-water deity,

the oracle divine of the gushing lady passenger. What glory! Even I had thought of other things than Hong Kong and twenty dollars a week when I used to write poetry in Burnham Beeches, or dream in the solemn stillness of Westminster Abbey.

It was close on ten o'clock when I left him, though I must confess I would have obtruded a little longer on his patience had I not known that he had to be up again in two hours to keep his watch.

The night was very dark and threatening, the wind coming across the water in fitful gusts. Now and again a great wave was flung back from our bows with an ominous crash, and leaning over the bulwarks I watched with a dreamy sort of interest the white line of froth form, lift itself above the black water, and then subside in infinite darkness. Something in the air told me that a storm was brewing away in the south-west, and I immediately thought of the poor opinion expressed by the captain of the sea-going qualities of his ship; but as I believed him to be indulging in a little pessimistic exaggeration, I listened with comparative indifference to the fitful southing of the wind as it played round the stays of the funnel.

Motionless I leant against the bulwarks, thinking of nothing in particular, or perhaps of a certain Sunday afternoon which I had spent in a punt just above Sunbury; of a crimson cushion and a gold-headed girl. Certes, it was a strange contrast, and Sunbury was a long stretch to bridge. Then all at once I seemed to hear voices a little aft of me, and peering intently into the darkness I discovered a darker shadow. Well, that was nothing. Other people had as much right on deck as I. This I fully recognised; but as this shadow began imperceptibly to draw near, and as it continued to whisper in a way incomprehensible, I thought it better to make my presence known. This I did by stamping hard upon the deck as I stepped out from the side.

The shadow immediately resolved itself into two figures, which seemed to shrink in closer to the bulwarks; but there being no way of escaping me I saw that one was the captain and that the other was a Chinaman, evidently one of our coolie passengers forward—a fellow who towered head and shoulders above Macshiel.

Though thinking it strange, I passed on,

apparently oblivious of their proximity, and getting to the leeward of the deck-house, filled and lit a pipe. Here, a minute or so after, the captain joined me.

"Glass is going down," he began, in his civillest manner. "I think we shall have a blow before morning. Listen;" and he pointed aloft, as though to locate the strange whistling of the wind. "Isn't that a warning as plain as any spoken word?"

"True, to the ear that understands the language."

He laughed rather brusquely.

"A man can't spend twenty years on the coast and not understand the lingo."

"Have you been out here so long?"

"So long that the cursed stink of China has got into my blood. You don't know what that is—eh? When did you come out?"

"Three years ago."

"Ah! Then you can still smell a Chinaman in the dark?"

I admitted as much, but with an intonation which might easily have been questioned. He, failing to notice it, continued—

"Yes, twenty years of coast work, sailing these seas till I sometimes wish they'd open

and swallow me up. Twenty years of toil, and twenty—forty fortunes made for other men, and devil a stick or stone of my own. That's the story of my life, young man. What do you think of it?"

"Candidly, not much."

He laughed almost boisterously. It was a mad, reckless laugh, which set me wondering.

"No, one could hardly call it successful. A dog's life aboard, and a fool's life ashore. A drunken bout and a bad woman: then carry him on board and make the brute work. And so he works for months, with but one object in view—the drunken bout and the bad woman once again. That's the romance of the sea, my young friend—this hell-pond of the devil's making."

Needless to say I was much amazed at this outburst, for not alone were the words strangely fierce and incongruous, but his manner of uttering them had all the snarling savageness of a snapping beast.

"Fate," said I sententiously, "has dropped us underneath. We may grumble, and scratch, and howl; but if we don't behave ourselves, the man above will probably kick out our brains."

"I intend to have a kick, nevertheless," said he, his voice sounding strangely desperate.

"Well, be careful. The man above is shod with iron."

"Damn him, yes! But I'll tear the iron from his heel and fling it in his face. I'm sick of it, I tell you—sick of working for other people."

"The common lot," said I.

"But mine no longer."

I laughed a little at this unexpected outburst.

"Well, captain, we must make the best of our opportunities."

"I mean to ;" and he bound the declaration with a stupendous oath.

Thinking some strange things, I said—

"My dear captain, you were born a hundred years too late."

"Perhaps ;" and though I could not see his face, I knew he smiled grimly. "At any rate I've been too damned honest for this world !"

I did not altogether like this. There was an absence of modesty about the confession which robbed it of much of its value. A man complaining of his honesty is like a woman who grieves because she has never succumbed to temptation.

“ Well, captain, I suppose honesty is a comparative quality, after all ? ”

“ Very,” said he. “ It all depends on how a thing’s done. I’ve come to the conclusion that the thing that pays best is best.”

“ But will not honesty pay best in the long run ? ”

“ My young friend,” said he impressively, “ there is no such thing as honesty.”

“ Yet there is something we call by that name.”

“ A mere word—a played-out superstition. Did you ever know an honest man ? ”

It was curious, but when the question was put in this way I could not answer. Had I ? I did know.

Noting my embarrassment, he added, with a chuckle—

“ No, nor I either, nor anybody else.”

I might have retorted, but to little purpose; so he, accepting my silence as a sign of defeat, shuffled off with a laugh and disappeared below. Leaning against the rail, I smoked on in the darkness. Beneath me the screw swirled angrily, and gradually the wind increased. Occasionally we encountered a stray sea bigger than any of its fellows, and then

the old boat gave a most unpleasant lurch—a disagreeable reminder that ours was a most unstable footing.

The captain's words, too, seemed rather ominous; for when a man who has journeyed half-way through middle life comes to the conclusion that honesty is a decrepit superstition, there must be something radically wrong with the world—or with the individual. There was likewise a passionate regret in the man's voice—a tone which by no possible process could be misinterpreted. It was genuine; the real regret of a man who has lost certain golden opportunities. Naturally, I could not then know the real state of his mind; and, truth to tell, his conversation did not particularly impress me. Yet I fancied I was not without an inkling of his inner thoughts. That the man rankled with envy was apparent; that he was grimly desperate was equally obvious. I thought, too, of his strange whispering with the big Chinaman, and wondered if he had a reason for not referring to it.

Yes, it's all clear enough now—a sort of let me see the numbers go up and I'll give you the name of the winner. At the time I

laughed somewhat at the splutterings of the disappointed mariner; after that I forgot all about him as I listened to the sea and thought of my future.

When I awoke the next morning it was with a jerk which nearly sent me flying out of my berth. The bulkheads groaned, and everything that was on the floor slid gaily from side to side of the cabin. Out against the port the water foamed angrily, while the incessant pitching and rolling proclaimed the presence of big seas. With the utmost difficulty I dressed and scrambled up on deck.

It was blowing a great gale. The sea had risen alarmingly during the night, and was now running with a loud, sullen roar. Away forward the big waves thumped heavily upon our decks, sending up clouds of spray which, borne by the wind, glistened on the deck-house, the masts, and the rigging. Not a soul was to be seen upon the wet decks, though I knew that behind the weather-screen on the bridge the officer would be keeping his watch, possibly the captain also.

Sometimes I think I have an affinity with the wild swirling of waters, bred, perhaps, through a sense of security; for there is some-

thing grand in watching the baffled sea furiously fling itself upon the unyielding plates of a sturdy vessel. Indeed, so intent was I gazing at the curious contest, that for a time I did not notice that we were only going about half-speed.

The mate came up from below smothered in oilskins, his old sou'wester tied tightly under his chin. As he stepped out on deck and took a look round, he mumbled a surly "Good morning."

"Good morning," I replied. "Nice weather!"

It was sarcastic, but unavoidable. The bad weather had got into me in some way.

"Yes," he growled; "makes one in love with the ocean, don't it?"

I admitted that such elemental eccentricities were conducive to extreme physical enjoyment. Then I asked him how the glass stood.

"Steady," said he.

"That means a continuance of this agreeable weather?"

"That's it. If I was a passenger I'd go below—and stick there."

"But, you see, I am unaccustomed to this sort of thing, and this is a sensation."

"It strikes me you'll have a few more sensations before you see the last of this packet."

His narrow, beady eyes glistened into mine, and something very like a sneer stole up from his ugly mouth. Then without more ado he slouched off forward, steadying himself from time to time by means of the bulwarks. I watched him duck to avoid the flying showers of spray—watched him carefully tread his way until he reached the bridge and disappeared.

This was my first conversation with the mate, and I must admit it did nothing to alter the opinion which I previously had formed of him. And, after all, what did it matter to me if that worthy officer were of the rough-and-ready order? Our acquaintanceship would last, at longest, until we reached Manila. So I thought. It was to last a little longer.

About ten minutes after the mate had disappeared forward, and while I yet clung to one of the mizzen stays watching the swirling of the sea, I became aware of an unusual presence near me, and turning round I beheld a big Chinaman standing in the doorway of the deck-house. I looked at him and he looked at me, and I saw a smile steal from his little

black eyes right down to his ugly mouth. For a Chinaman he was an exceedingly well-built fellow, and though apparently approaching middle age and getting somewhat stout, was of an appearance which would command respect in any company. His dress was of the usual coolie pattern—a loose blouse, and short, wide breeches; though instead of being bare-footed he wore a pair of huge sea-boots which came right up to his knees. On his head was a soft, peaked cap, which completely hid his pigtail.

"Hullo!" said I, "what are you doing here?"

He shook his head and grinned, though he knew as well as I that he had no right aft.

"Nothin', cap'n."

"I suppose you know you're not allowed here?"

"No sabbee, cap'n."

I pointed forward.

"You sabbee forward?"

"No sabbee folward, cap'n," said the fellow.

"You sabbee this?" and I pointed to the toe of my boot.

His brows contracted, and his upper lip came down.

“Sabbee.”

“Then if you don’t want to feel the weight of it—clear.”

Here I ought to confess that I am not a very formidable fellow to look at, though, in justice to myself, I must admit that my appearance rather belies me. But in this case it was moral rather than physical force which was necessary. It is, one might say, chiefly by moral force that the white man holds sway over his darker and less fortunate brother; though I don’t deny that it is absolutely necessary physically to drub that unfortunate brother first. It was on moral superiority I chiefly relied in my projected attack; yet the way the fellow’s hands went up as I approached bespoke an indifference to moral persuasion which was quite revolting. Still, if I may say so without boasting, I have a deceptive appearance; and, firmly believing in the inferiority of the yellow man, I would undoubtedly have kicked him had not the second mate at that moment stepped in between us.

“What’s the matter here?” cried he.

The chow smiled. I turned to explain.

"I fear this fellow is loafing about for no good purpose."

Hayling laid his great hand on the Chinaman's shoulder and swung him round, his face pointing forward.

"That's your quarter of the ship," he said—"get." With that he caught the Celestial a kick that made the great fellow hop.

"Damn you!" howled the Chinaman, in the plainest English I ever heard in my life; and with an agility wonderful in such a big man he swung round and sprang at the second mate. But Hayling was as quick as he. He stepped back smartly, and like lightning his hands went up. The Chinaman paused, stared venomously at the Australian, then turned about and slunk away forward.

Hayling's face, which in an instant had grown as hard as iron, relaxed immediately, and he turned to me with a smile.

"A nice customer! I wonder where he came from?"

"It seems absurd to say so, but I could swear he came from below."

"From the saloon?" he asked incredulously.

"From the saloon."

This seemed rather to puzzle him. He looked like a man troubled with thought.

"Any one down there?" he asked.

"Only the captain. The mate came up a few minutes ago."

"Curious!" he muttered under his breath.

"What is?"

"Oh, nothing. I don't think our Celestial friend will come aft again in a hurry."

"Not while you're about at any rate."

He smiled, but it was a smile not altogether free of anxiety; as, indeed, it could hardly have been if he had seen the malevolent scowl on the big Chinaman's face.

I watched him as he went forward along the slippery decks, and I thought of the way his hands went up and the iron look that leapt to his face. There was skill and there was knowledge in his quick posturing, and a fierce will behind his prodigious muscle. Yes, assuredly Mr. Hayling was one whom it would be better not to offend.

CHAPTER III

UNCERTAINTY

ALL that afternoon the wind blew so hard that the vessel made little headway. Indeed, there was no attempt at forcing her along; throughout the long hours the engines were kept at half speed.

With me the time passed drearily. Having the whole day on my hands, and no one to whom I could speak, I began to wish I had taken Captain Macshiel's advice and waited for one of the regular steamers. As for the captain, he rarely showed up at all, and I did not like to go plaguing the second mate, knowing he would have too little time to rest during such weather. So, having nothing else to do, I went below and tried to sleep, cursing the delay with all the energy of selfish disappointment.

Towards evening the wind went down, and by nine or ten o'clock the moon came out and the sea grew comparatively smooth, at least smooth enough to let us continue our way at full speed. And yet, though I listened anxiously for the quicker beat of the screw, and paid sundry visits to the engine-room skylight to watch the slow-moving machinery, that quicker beat never came, and those huge cranks continued to revolve in their own majestic fashion.

I caught a glimpse of the mate as he was passing aft, and hurrying after him inquired the reason of our slow progression; but he only grinned and told me to go and ask the captain. This I thought highly uncivil; for the monotony of the day, coupled with a vague mysteriousness which seemed to pervade the ship, was fast driving me into a fit of nervous irritation. Anything to relieve the dullness would have been welcome; even the event of the big Chinaman aft with the request for saloon accommodation. I smoked in solitude until I got tired of the pipe, and then I was glad to creep below and turn in.

I was in no hurry to get up next morning, though I saw by the flashing on the glass of

the port that the sun was shining, and I knew by the steadiness that the sea had gone down and that the ship was riding on an even keel. To my surprise, though, I still heard the slow crunch, crunch of the screw, which told me that we had not yet increased our speed. At this I must admit that I felt exceedingly exasperated, and I had some unconsoling thoughts of the wretched voyage lasting a fortnight.

I sprang out of the bunk, opened the port, and had a peep through. The sea sparkled brightly, and was as smooth as the most ardent landsman could desire; nor, as far as my observation went, was there a cloud in the sky.

I must say that peep at the sea and the sunshine put me in a more charitable mood. I hastily dressed, ate my breakfast in solitary splendour, and then went up on deck.

At first I noticed nothing but the extreme placidity of the sea and the delicious fragrance of the air; but presently my attention was attracted by an unwonted bustle which was going on forward. Moved by curiosity, I walked thither, and there beheld the crew rigging up a cannon of considerable dimensions. I don't know much about cannon

myself, but this seemed of a fair size and capable of discharging an impressive projectile. I saw that it was mounted on a carriage, that it was a breechloader, and evidently of the latest pattern.

I admit I failed to see the object of so much unnecessary labour. What had a dirty little tramp like the *Pulo Way* to do with breech-loading cannon or any of the paraphernalia of dreadful war? It was, in its way, a surprise; but a greater one was in store for me when I discovered that the director of ceremonies, or superintendent in chief, was no less a person than the big Chinaman whom the second mate had kicked so unceremoniously the day before. His great form loomed up plainly on the fo'c'sle head, and I saw by his gestures that he not only was deeply absorbed in his work, but that he also knew something about it. The captain was there with his mate, but he seemed to have handed over all authority to the big Chinaman. I was not near enough to hear what the big fellow said, as I stood under the bridge; but I followed his every movement with interest, and I thought that the men worked with an unusual energy.

For the life of me I couldn't see the fun of

playing thus at warships, and from personal knowledge I can disprove the fallacy that coming events cast their shadows before. The real object of our gun-mounting never so much as entered my head.

Presently the captain descended the fo'c'sle steps and came towards me. In one hand he held a formidable-looking marline-spike, in the other a length of teased-out rope.

"Good morning, captain," said I. "Are you going to turn the *Pulo Way* into a man-o'-war?"

He shot a quick, inquiring look out of his little pale eyes, while a curious smile curled the tip of his parrot beak. He scratched amid his neck-whiskers with the point of the marline-spike.

"Well," he answered slowly, "finding the voyage a wee bit monotonous, we're just thinking of trying our hand at a little shooting."

"Shooting! At what?"

"Well, perhaps it may be albatrosses, or perhaps it may not be. You can never tell. It's just what you're not wanting that'll come all the way to meet you."

"But surely you don't get albatrosses in these latitudes?"

“Did I say it would be albatrosses? You understand—I merely go on supposition. For all I know to the contrary, we may be shooting sharks.”

“Well, look out that you don’t shoot yourselves.”

“I think you may go to sleep without praying for us. You see, it’s a wee bit of metal we’re taking over for the Spaniards, and we just thought we’d like to test it for them.”

Again he scratched his neck fringe, and then playfully rubbed the teased-out end of the rope in among his black whiskers. But his little pale eyes fixed themselves on my face with a look so intensely piercing, that I had to turn from him and pretend to watch the men on the fo’c’sle.

He in the meantime passed behind me and mounted the bridge, and a moment or two after I saw him go over to the other side and speak with Hayling. What he said I could not hear; but judging from the grave look on the second mate’s face it seemed of much importance. Truly, I had not liked the look of Captain Macshiel, nor were his facetious replies to my questions such as met with my

approval. Still, when the king condescends to joke, one must hold one's sides with laughter.

I leant just under the break of the bridge, with my back against one of the stanchions which supported it. In this position I had a full view of the work that was going on forward; if I turned my head a little to the right and looked up, I could see Hayling if he happened to be leaning over the rail in the starboard corner. Indeed, we had exchanged several smiles and nods, and it was his serious face, looking towards the cannon, which first made me regard with suspicion the work that was going on there. Plainly, I saw that he did not approve of it, and it made me ask myself the question, Why?

But, to be candid, at the time the business did not seem of much moment, and I watched the proceedings merely because I had nothing else to do. Occasionally I looked up at Hayling and smiled; but, indifferent as I was, I thought each time I saw him that his grim face grew grimmer.

As I said, I was leaning against the stanchion just under the break of the bridge, my pipe in my mouth, my eyes fixed on the men

forward, who were rapidly getting the gun into position, when all at once I happened to look up at the starboard corner. There was Hayling partly hanging over the rail, a look of fear and warning in his face. My eyes plainly asked what was the matter, and he replied by shaking his head backwards—a quick, sharp movement which I read as expressing haste and fear. Instantly I drew back, subject to an involuntary impulse, and as I did so a marline-spike fell hissing at my feet and struck with a dull thud into the deck. Had I not moved on the second, the heavy instrument would have crashed through my skull.

For a time I trembled like a woman, a shivering sensation sweeping me from head to foot. Then, with a devout “Thank God!” I stepped out from under the bridge and encountered the penitent face of the captain.

“You’re not hurt, Mr. Ravensford?”

“No, not this time.”

“That’s lucky,” said he. “The thing slipped like water through my fingers. Watching the fo’c’sle yonder, I quite forgot what I had in my hand. Ay, indeed it might have been very serious.”

"Rather. You see, the thing came down *point* first;" and I went and pulled it out of the deck where it still stood.

"Indeed, and just think of that!" said he, evidently much alarmed. "And *point* first! Why, man, had it struck you it would have made shark's meat of you in half a jiff. I cannot congratulate myself too much—or you."

"It is the unexpected that happens, Captain Macshiel. For the future I shall be more careful of marline-spikes;" and with that I handed him up the heavy, ugly weapon. His eyes gleamed strangely as they looked down into mine, and the hand that he stretched forth trembled visibly. But sickening excitement prevented a more analytical scrutiny. My heart still beat violently; every pulse in me was going at top speed.

I looked up at Hayling, and got a rare glad smile from him.

"A close thing," said he.

"Very."

Then he turned away, but not without giving me a warning look.

I made my way aft, feeling but ill at ease. The dropping of the marline-spike was a thing

that might easily have happened, and, perhaps, there was no reason why I should have removed this from the ordinary category of accidents; but as I thought over the warning nod from Hayling I grew full of strange conjecture. Things seemed a bit topsy-turvy aboard the *Pulo Way*. What with mounting cannon under the immediate supervision of the big coolie, whom I seemed to have some instinctive reason for mistrusting; the unwillingness to take me as a passenger, and the promiscuous dropping of marline-spikes, *point* downwards, I had much troubled thought to engage my mind. Nor was that mind likely to be appeased until I had had a good talk with the second mate, whose strange face seemed to haunt me.

Just after eight bells, or twelve o'clock, the captain came aft, after having, in conjunction with Hayling, taken the sun. Ten minutes or so later the screw began to revolve rapidly, and on looking over the side I saw that we were going at full speed. So much, at least, was gratifying. With a continuance of this weather another twenty-four hours at most ought to see us steaming into Manila harbour, when I, for one, would not be sorry to say

goodbye to the *Pulo Way* and all aboard of her, with, perhaps, the exception of Hayling. Something told me that he was different from the others, and I felt that we ought to know each other better.

Slowly the afternoon passed, the ship making good progress. On two or three occasions I tried to get a word with the second mate, but he seemed purposely to avoid me ; and not doubting that he had good cause for what he did, I inconvenienced him as little as possible. But once, as he passed me on the deck, he whispered, "Come to my room to-night." He did not turn his head as if addressing me, nor did he pause for a second in his stride. At this I wondered, but before my wonder left me he had passed on, and I had no chance to speak. Looking forward, I caught a glimpse of the mate, who was on the bridge. As he saw me look up he slid away, and the funnel immediately hid him ; but I knew that he had been watching Hayling, and I continued to conjecture.

CHAPTER IV

WHITHER SAILING ?

ABOUT five o'clock that afternoon, as I sat aft by the wheel-house reading, I was startled by the report of a cannon, and on hurrying forward I saw that Captain Macshiel, the mate, and the big coolie were testing the newly erected piece of ordnance. Even as I watched I saw the Chinaman load, take aim, and then discharge the weapon. Looking away out over the bows, I beheld the shell strike the water some distance ahead.

This was shark-shooting with a vengeance, only where were the sharks? I puzzled much, being quite at a loss to comprehend the situation.

The captain saw me, and, waving his hand advanced.

"She's a bonnie bit of baggage," he grinned.

"Who is?" I asked rather abruptly, resenting the man's tone.

He nodded towards the gun. "She's a winsome lassie, no doubt of it; and our gunner declares he can hit the dorsal fin of a shark at a distance of a thousand yards."

"A wonderful fellow, indeed! Who is he?"

"That's just what I cannot tell you."

"Then where did he learn his gunnery?"

"It's a secret, man—a secret that he absolutely refuses to disclose; but I'm just waiting to worm it out of him, and when I do I'll tell you all about it."

I had no particular fancy for Captain Macshiel in his jocular moods. I didn't like the play of his eyes, nor did his malevolent grinning add any beauty to his cadaverous face. At times I fancied that he smiled only with the tip of his nose, that parrot beak which seemed always on the point of pecking. Indeed, it worked strangely, with a peculiar contracting and expanding motion, whenever he moved his jaws; and even when his face was in repose, it looked like the ugly beak of

a brooding hawk. One was not surprised to find the eyes open, to know that the vulture was watching. For my part, I would rather have had the mate with his fat pig face and his hideous little eyes. He was unmistakably a brute, with brute stamped in big letters all over his face and figure; but a palpable brute, being instantly known, is guarded against accordingly. With men like Captain Macshiel one might be duped, especially as an honest man hates to think his brother a rogue.

Not having, as I have said, any particular regard for him or his humour, I smiled rather sullenly and made my way aft, where I managed to pass the time rather badly until tea was announced. As only the mate and I took it together the meal was not unduly prolonged. Mr. Murrell—for that was the gentleman's name—did not make half a dozen remarks all the time we were at the table. He leant over his plate, simply stuffing himself with bread and cold meat until his grunting and clicking of jaws grew exceedingly monotonous. I therefore rose and left him, and, as it happened, at a very critical moment; for the unbounded prodigality with which he gorged eventually brought on a

violent fit of coughing, which blinded him and almost laid him low.

Going up on deck, I lit my pipe, heroically resolved to wait patiently until such time as I could with safety make my way to Hayling's cabin; for you may be sure I was crammed full of curiosity, the strange doings on board having bred in me an anxiety foreign to my nature.

Slowly the time passed. I saw the mate go forward, and then, after what seemed a considerable period, he came aft again with the captain. Then the two went below, and as I guessed it meant a smoke and a glass of grog I made my way to Hayling's room.

He was evidently awaiting me, for the door opened immediately to my knock, and when he saw me he seemed rather relieved.

"Glad you've come, old man," he said, gripping my hand in his hearty fashion. Then instantly, somewhat to my surprise, he locked the door and drew the curtain over it.

"Hullo!" said I, "what's the meaning of this?"

"A mere precautionary measure," he replied.

I looked at him without speaking, and he

returned the look with interest. It was the steadiest gaze I have ever encountered—a clear, masterful look, that almost seemed to compel honesty. Apparently satisfied, he smiled, handed me a cheroot, and lit one himself.

“Well,” he queried, ejecting a huge cloud of smoke, through which I saw the steady radiance of his grave eyes, “what do you think of the *Pulo Way*?”

“I am beginning to think some very queer things. I admit Captain Macshiel is a puzzle.”

He seemed to think so too; but, judging from his reticence, I guessed he was rather afraid to speak. To rid him of suspicion was therefore my first endeavour.

“Look here, Hayling,” said I; “you don’t know me, and of course I don’t know you, but I believe we understand each other. Is that so?”

“Quite;” and he held out his hand. Of one thing I felt sure—no one but a warm-hearted man could have given such a grip.

“Then, to be candid with you, I have been entertaining some exceedingly grave suspicions as to the good faith of Captain Macshiel and his crew.”

"And not without cause, I should say. I'm devilish sorry I ever came aboard."

"And I, though I must admit that Captain Macshiel tried his hardest to prevent me."

Then I told him of my first interview with the skipper of the *Pulo Way*, and of the many reasons with which that worthy mariner sought to restrain me from joining.

"I too came on board almost at the last moment," said the second mate. "As it is, we have no real third. Our Number One takes the first watch—a surly brute who would skin his own mother for ten dollars. Seems to be rather thick with the big coolie who mounted the cannon. If I were the captain of this ship I'd clap them both in irons."

"By the way, what's the meaning of this cannon? When I asked the captain he facetiously replied that it was to shoot sharks."

The Australian looked grave.

"If he had said to shoot gulls he might have been nearer the mark."

"Gulls?" I echoed, reading something much more serious in his face.

"Look here, old man," said he, "I know no more about that cannon than you do, nor of the coolie who works it; but I would trust

neither. At all events, it's the first time I ever heard of a tramp aping a man-o'-war, and I don't like it."

"What, then, is your opinion?"

"I have many, some of them madly absurd. Yet there is one thing of which I can speak with absolute certainty." Here he stopped, and even in the privacy of his own room, with door locked and curtain drawn, looked round and lowered his voice: "*We are not steering towards Manila!*"

I could scarcely credit my hearing, but looked at him in a way that forced him to repeat the sentence.

"You are sure?"

"As sure as mortal man can be. If, as I understand, this ship was to go direct to Manila, I can assure you, on my honour, that she is not pointing that way at present."

"Certainly she was to go direct to Manila. That's why I came by her. Where else should she be going?"

"When I left the bridge her nose was pointing more to the south and west."

"And where would that lead us?"

"To the Mindoro Strait, far to the south of Manila.

"And where and what the deuce is the Mindoro Strait?"

"It is the channel the Australian ships take on their way up from Port Darwin."

"But perhaps Captain Macshiel has made a mistake? Remember, yesterday was dead reckoning."

"True; that's why I didn't speak yesterday; but to-day we got the sun."

"And did you take it?"

"I did."

I could see no way out of it. There was no earthly reason why I should doubt the accuracy of Hayling's statement, though inclination may have led me to modify it. He had worked out our position, and by what I could gather he was a man who thoroughly understood navigation. Truly, he had set the mind buzzing.

"Well," said I, befogged completely, and just a trifle eager to find my way, "what the deuce does it mean?"

For a time he was silent, pulling thoughtfully at his cigar. Then he looked me earnestly in the face.

"Captain Macshiel tried to persuade you not to join this ship?"

"Indeed, yes. At first I thought he would not have me at any price, which so annoyed me that I had half a mind to take another vessel."

"It's a pity you didn't."

"Why?"

"It's plain that you were not wanted; it's doubly plain now that you are in the way."

"I? My dear fellow, how can I be in the way?"

He looked mighty serious. His mouth formed into a rigid line, and his heavy brows came together in a deep furrow.

"Good God!" he cried suddenly. And then, as if ashamed of himself, he added, in an apologetic tone, "But of course it can't be?"

Startled at this abrupt outburst, I eyed him uneasily.

"What can't be?" I asked.

"Look here," said he, "I don't want to frighten you, and it might have been an accident; but have you forgotten the marline-spike?"

"On the contrary, I have thought of it incessantly. Had it not been for you the thing would have brained me."

"Understand, I lay no charge against Captain Macshiel; but I thought he handled the thing carelessly, and I saw your danger."

It was now my turn to blanch. What if that which I had regarded as an accident had really been premeditated? It was enough to make one wish one's self safe at home.

I sprang up with an oath, and foolishly declared that I would go at once to the captain and wring the truth from him, the wizened little wretch; but level-headed Hayling said that I would do nothing of the kind, and he accordingly pushed me back on the settee and handed me my grog. After all, we were only going on supposition, and the marline-spike might have fallen by accident.

"But he cannot deny that the ship is not pointing towards Manila?"

"You forget that he is the captain, and that he can sail his ship in his own way."

"Then what do you really think?"

"To be candid with you, Ravensford, I have so many thoughts that they bewilder me. But my advice to you is—be careful. Don't stand too near an open hatch, or wander about the decks at night. I don't say that you are positively in danger; but you must admit that

Captain Macshiel did not want you, and you know from experience that accidents will happen."

The devil take it, thought I, this is a pretty business; and as an occasional shiver ran down my back I seemed to realise the awful iniquity of man. Convinced that there was some devil's project brewing aboard, I questioned Hayling concerning the cannon forward and the big coolie. But he knew no more than I. Like me, he had watched the preparations, and, like me, he had marvelled at the sight; but he had not been taken into the confidence of either the captain or the mate, and what he imagined concerned only himself.

"But," said I, "if you are not one of them, is not your danger as great as mine?"

"The mate has already sounded me," he admitted; "but as I am not entirely without a certain amount of perception, and may, perhaps, possess a trifle of duplicity as well, he retired with little to his credit beyond a vague hope. Moreover, they find me useful."

"Well," I said, "I don't know what's in the air, but I feel there's something dashed bad. Whatever happens, we stand together—eh?"

"Yes," said he, and stretched out his hand to mine.

Just then the handle of the door was twisted violently, the door itself shaken until I thought it would come in. This demonstration was immediately followed by a fierce rat-tat. Hayling sprang across and unlocked the door, which upon being opened disclosed the distorted face of Murrell, the chief mate.

With an oath he inquired why the door was locked, and then, seeing me, he blurted out—

"Hullo, what are you doing here?"

Not liking his tone, I fired up and asked him what the deuce it had to do with him.

"Only that it's the second mate's watch below. You passengers seem to forget the men who keep watch while you are soundly snoring. I'll tell you what it is, Hayling, the old man doesn't like this sort of thing."

"Well," said Hayling, with a good-natured smile, "when I am found to be incapable of doing my duty, it will be time for the old man to talk."

"Ah, but you don't know the old man," grinned the chief. "He does first and talks afterwards. No hanky-panky aboard the *Pulo Way*."

“Won’t you come in?” said Hayling; for all this time the mate had lounged in the doorway, the curtain clutched in one hand, his ferrety little eyes darting suspicious glances all over the room.

“Thanks. I want a word or two with you.”

He favoured me with a most significant look. But I was already on my feet, and as the curtain fell behind me I heard him say, with a laugh, “What sort of a mug is that?” Curious as was the expression, I knew to whom he referred.

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERY INCREASES

AS I groped my way along the dark deck I thought of Hayling's warning, and realised how easily two or three men might spring upon a man and toss him overboard. The thought was not pleasant, nor was I the more relieved when I beheld a form flit hurriedly by the engine-room skylight. For a moment I entertained some singularly unpleasant thoughts; then rapidly made my way aft and went below.

A solitary oil lamp swung dismally in the saloon, and up through the half-open skylight I heard the swish, swish of the water as it fell back from the vessel's sides. An uncanny, nervous shiver ran through me, and with nothing more than a glance round I

slipped into my cabin, and for the first time bolted the door.

There could be no longer any doubt as to the serious aspect of things—an aspect which was none the less terrifying on account of the scarcity of real knowledge. So, being full of the warning of my friend the second mate, and beset with vague suspicion, I fished out a revolver from the bottom of my big trunk, carefully loaded it, and then placed the weapon beneath my pillow. I was not a warlike man, and I prayed devoutly that there would be no demand for firearms; but I had only one life to lose, and though not the best of lives, it was the best I had.

It was a long time before I got to sleep, but when I did I slept soundly enough, never waking until the steward knocked at my door to tell me it was time to get up. Then, jumping out and looking through the port, I saw that the sun was already high, and that the ship had been slowed down again. Exasperated beyond all measure, I dressed hurriedly and scrambled up on deck, eager to question the captain concerning this further delay. But, to my chagrin, no one was in sight, and of course I was not allowed to

mount the bridge. A good ten minutes of angry pacing up and down followed, during which time I saw the captain and the mate perched up in the starboard corner of the bridge, intently sweeping the sea with their glasses. At the same moment I beheld Hayling coming aft, and being sure that he had seen me I slipped behind the deck-house, a position which hid me from the men forward.

Presently he swung round the corner and came towards me, smiling somewhat recklessly, I thought.

"Well," said he, "had a good night?"

"I suppose so."

He laughed; but this time the white teeth shone out from behind his dark moustache.

"You're a mysterious beggar, Hayling."

"Not in the least."

"Can you tell me why we have slowed down?"

"I cannot."

"Nothing wrong with the engines?"

"I should say not, since they are kept going."

"But the engineer may be afraid to send them along at full speed."

"He may."

"But you doubt it?"

"I do."

He was coldly, horribly laconic.

"Tell me, are we still steering *from* Manila?"

"Yes. Just go to the side and take a peep over the starboard bow."

Doing as I was bidden, I thought I saw an unusual swirling of waters some distance ahead. Returning to him, I put the question—

"What is that yonder?"

"The Scarborough Shoal," said he.

"And we ought to be nowhere near it?"

"Nowhere."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite; even though the old man has locked me out of the chart-room."

"But do ships never come this way to go to Manila?"

"Not so far to the westward. We are in the track of the Australian ships—of one coming from Port Darwin to Hong Kong. If her skipper knows his road he will come up the Molucca Passage, through the Celebes and Sulu Seas, and so on into the China Sea by the Mindoro Strait. We have no right

where we are, and if Captain Macshiel is not a fool, he has come for a certain purpose."

"What purpose?" I queried.

He looked very serious.

"That I don't know, but I believe we are afloat in very strange company."

Just then the captain appeared round the corner of the deck-house, and when he saw Hayling his ragged brows instantly contracted. A look of intense annoyance swept his face; but the next moment he greeted me with one of his pleasantest smiles. Hayling touched his cap and moved away.

The captain watched him without speaking; then turning to me, said—

"Yonder fellow might make himself a bit more agreeable, considering how he loves a gossip."

"I merely asked him why we were going slow, and what shoal that was out yonder."

"And he told you?"

"He couldn't tell me why we were going slow; but he said the shoal was the Scarborough."

"Nothing more, I suppose?"

"No, nothing much. By the way, captain, is there anything wrong with the engines?"

"That's just it," said he. "The bearings got so mortal hot that the engineer had to slow down. It's annoying—extremely annoying."

"But is that really the Scarborough yonder?"

"Maybe," said he dryly. "And why not the Scarborough as well as anything else?"

"Because, if it is, we who are bound for Manila ought to be nowhere near it."

"So, so," he grinned, "that hulking brute has been talking, eh? Well, he's very clever, no doubt; but supposing the Scarborough is a little bit off the straight line, it is the safe way, and the one I always take."

I bowed. What more was there to be said? A man must sail his ship in his own way.

"And when do you think we ought to reach Manila?"

"That I can't say for certain. It will depend chiefly on the engineer. Perhaps tomorrow—perhaps longer."

Again his cadaverous face wrinkled itself into an insinuating grin, and with an awkward attempt at ease he shuffled below, leaving me full of perplexity and doubt, though doubt of his honesty I had none. His excuses were so

palpably insincere that only his intense love of subterfuge could have prompted him to utter them.

Yet shortly after this the engines were set going at full speed once again, and were kept at a high pressure all through that night and well on into the next afternoon until we sighted land. Then, when I was once more beginning to entertain the vague hope of reaching my destination, they stopped suddenly. I hurried forward to the engine-room skylight and looked down, but beyond a greaser or two who were oiling and polishing up, I could see nothing.

As I walked disconsolately aft, the captain overtook me.

"Upon my soul," he whined, looking at me in a way that was anything but complimentary, "the very devil himself seems to have boarded us this voyage! Never in my life have I encountered such a run of bad luck. I doubt much if we shall reach Manila Bay inside this week."

"The engines have broken down, then?" said I, inwardly cursing the delay.

"Badly. May the devil toast the man who invented engines!"

“But of course you can mend them?”

“That remains to be seen. Our engineer is a clever enough chap, a Portugee from Macao; but he has neither the appliances nor the men.”

I walked away feeling at war with the world, cursing the mad obstinacy which had made me join this ship against my better sense. Yet calmer reason offered an excuse for the madness of my choice.

All the rest of that day we lay idly rolling on the sea, and as every one to whom I could have spoken had managed to stow himself away, I underwent an extremely wretched experience. In my present uncertain, irritable mood I could not tolerate the dulness of my own company. I knew I was neither wanted nor liked aboard the ship, and though at any other time that would have occasioned me no regret, it was not a pleasant thought as things stood.

In appearance the *Pulo Way* was an ordinary sort of tramp, with a raised forecastle and stern, and a deep well amidships. I have mentioned the forecastle, on which the gun was mounted; in the stern this raised structure, which formed a short poop, from which the flag trailed on Sundays when the

ship was in port, was known as the wheel-house. Here were the big hand wheels, which were to be used in case anything went wrong with the steam-steering gear.

Into this wheel-house, then, the front of which had two large glass windows, which in turn were duly protected by two stout teak shutters, which slid into grooves on either side, I popped to light my pipe. Finding it more comfortable there than out in the keen night wind, I settled myself on an old piece of sailcloth, and sat thinking and smoking in the dark.

Presently I was aroused by hearing the hoarse laugh of the mate as that worthy approached. What had been said to make him laugh I could not tell; but the jocular outburst was followed by the captain saying, in a surly tone—

“You may laugh, Murrell, but I’d like to feel as certain of the job as you do.”

“Pooh, man!” replied the mate; and I thought his voice sounded exceedingly familiar. “You’re not getting squeamish, are you?”

The captain laughed constrainedly as he said—

"Perhaps a bit. Anyway, it's a ticklish job, and I wish it was well over. There's an element of uncertainty about the whole thing that doesn't suit me. Then there's the second mate and this numskull of a passenger."

"He that is not for me is against me," quoted the mate mockingly. "Leave them to me."

Again the captain laughingly replied, and in imagination I pictured his ugly little face, the malicious twinkle of his narrow eyes.

Here the mate poked his head into the wheel-house to light his pipe, while I shrank further back into the shadow, uneasy to a degree. I drew my breath in and held it fast; but the light in the man's eyes dazzled him so that he could not look beyond. After a few vigorous draws he turned again to his companion.

"I do not deny that what you call the element of uncertainty exists," he said. "But Gupp and I have gone so carefully into this that there can be little doubt of our success. It is a thousand to one she will pass through the Mindoro Strait. From there to Hong Kong is a straight line, and as we are on that line she *must* pass us."

"But what if she passes us at night?"

"We shall see her just the same."

The captain made some reply, the tone of which implied considerable doubt, but what he said I could not catch, as the men moved off together.

For a time I remained plunged deeply in thought, a whole battalion of conjectures stampeding through my mind. That the mate referred to some ship was apparent, while, curious to relate, in describing her movements he had employed almost the identical words made use of by Hayling.

Needless to say this conversation caused me considerable apprehension, especially as I had long since begun to doubt the good faith of Captain Macshiel. That we had purposely come out of our way, and for no righteous cause, I feared, was now self-evident. Certain it was that the captain expected to meet a ship in this neighbourhood, but for a good or an evil purpose who should say? What that purpose really was I did not even dream of then, it being one of those awful things which would never enter into the calculations of an ordinary person.

But what I had easily grasped, and what, in-

deed, I had long since known, was the fact that my presence on board the *Pulo Way* did not meet with the approval of the captain or his mate ; and if my imaginings were not wholly vain I expected some personal assurance of it before long.

Another thing that rather puzzled me was the mention of the name Gupp. Who and what was Gupp ? and what had he to do with this enterprise ? Here I was entirely non-plussed, for I knew that from officers to engineers no one on board had such a name. I was naturally forced to conclude that Mr. Gupp was a gentleman who had given good advice and stayed behind in Hong Kong. Wise Mr. Gupp ; I envied him his wisdom.

But I was to learn more of him the next morning. About half-past ten, as I sat alternately reading and watching the water break on the island just abeam of us, to which we had drawn very near during the night, Hayling came aft, and when opposite me he stopped.

“ Morning,” he said. “ Have you seen our new third ? ”

“ New third ? ” I echoed.

“ Yes ; a most tremendous surprise. A gentleman by the name of Gupp.”

This was too much for me. I sprang excitedly from my chair.

"You're joking, Hayling?"

"Honour bright," said he. "Go forward yourself, and you'll see him marching up and down the bridge as large as life."

"Who is this man?"

"Hanged if I know. The captain brought him forward this morning and introduced him as 'Mr. Gupp, our new third officer.' It was not my business to ask who Mr. Gupp was, or where the deuce he sprang from."

"But you guess who he is?"

"Yes; if I am not mistaken he is the big coolie who mounted the gun forward;" and with that he slipped from my side and passed aft to the wheel-house, but so suddenly that I looked round to see the cause.

The captain had just come up from below.

I strolled forward to have a peep at Mr. Gupp, and saw a big, stout man, with a fat, clean-shaven face. I couldn't get a very close look at him, but what I saw did not impress me. Truly, the *Pulo Way* was a strange ship, and I guessed instinctively that the curtain was about to rise on the first act of a stranger drama.

CHAPTER VI

LUIZ THE PORTUGEE

FOR the next two days we lay idly floating upon the water, apparently as helpless as a log, though, curious to relate, the ship never seemed to drift within a dangerous distance of the land. Indeed, more than once during my half-waking slumbers I dreamt that the engines were going slowly; but that, according to official statement, was an utter impossibility. And yet I doubted that it was all a dream.

During this time I could not have spoken more than half a dozen words to Captain Macshiel. He seemed purposely to avoid me, and whenever I broached the subject of our delay he grew so exceedingly irritable that he never even took the trouble to be civil. I could see

that his anxiety was playing the deuce with him, and that he shared none of the jaunty confidence of Murrell, or the new third officer, Mr. Gupp. Within the last two days that worthy had become quite a familiar figure on the quarter-deck of the *Pulo Way*, and I saw with no little uneasiness that he exercised a considerable influence over the more vacillating captain. This, coupled with long conferences and much drink, brought about such a shocking state of discipline that I would not have been surprised to see the crew walk aft in a body and demand saloon accommodation.

As for Mr. Gupp, he puzzled me greatly. I was sure that I had not met him before the advent of the big coolie. That he had masqueraded as the latter was obvious. There were the unmistakable face and figure, coupled with which was the disappearance of the coolie to account for, and Mr. Gupp's undoubted affection for the gun forward. I seemed to have met the man somewhere—to have come in contact with him in some way or other—but where or how I could not tell. Sometimes I was sure he knew and understood my thoughts.

On the afternoon of the second day, as I

took my constitutional up and down the deck, I saw the captain, Murrell, and Gupp upon the bridge, each with a glass in his hand, with which, at short intervals, he swept the distant horizon. What the men expected to see I guessed well enough, and as I approached them I caught many eager exclamations; but I resumed my walk up and down as though oblivious of their presence. What they did, or intended to do, was no concern of mine, and so I was determined to show them.

Yet as I walked forward I noticed that the captain held in his hand a little slip of paper; while the mate, a large sheet of white paper before him, upon which he had evidently drawn some figures or designs, was pointing from one piece of paper to the other and speaking very earnestly. Then the captain grew excited and waved his slip in the mate's face. As he did so the thing slid from his fingers and the wind caught it and blew it towards me. I saw it take an ominous flutter outwards, and I feared it would go overboard. Quickly springing forward, I made a grab and caught it just in time. I heard some one call from the bridge, "Here,

you, hand that over!" and an immediate shuffling of feet followed.

What I had caught was merely a newspaper cutting; but as I felt my fingers close upon it I suddenly remembered that when I first saw Captain Macshiel he was studying such a piece of paper in company with a big black-bearded individual. I also recollected that he hastily crumpled up the slip and hid it away in his pocket. Therefore, acting on some inward suggestion, I straightened it out.

It was a very small cutting, and contained but three or four lines of print. At either end of the paragraph a cross was marked in red pencil. Between the crosses the print said:—

"The *Chung-Tong*, with the Australian mail on board, left Sydney for Port Darwin and Hong Kong on the 25th instant. Besides a large mail and several passengers, she carries £50,000 in gold."

I had just time to master so much, when the slip was snatched from my fingers. Looking up, I encountered the ugly face of Mr. Gupp.

"Here, you," he cried sharply, "what the

blazes do you mean by peeping into other people's property?"

"Why," I said, trying to look as though I had not noticed his tone, "it's only a cutting from a newspaper."

"What if it is? You saw whose it was, didn't you?"

"Oh, go to the devil! I can't talk to you."

"But I'll talk to you," he spluttered, "and in a way you won't like!"

I favoured him with a look of some contempt; but, truth to tell, I had no great liking for his measure. I hold it imprudent in the extreme for a man wilfully to batter his brains against a wall, even though he may do the wall some little damage. Moreover, my position on board was not so secure that I could afford to give vent to my natural indignation.

Hiding my wrath as best I could, I called in discretion, and beat an immediate retreat. The fellow went forward, muttering vaguely to himself. The fact is the reading of that newspaper cutting had caused me intense agitation, and as I walked aft I saw the *Pulo Way* engaged in one of the most daring

adventures of these or of any other times. So daring was it, so almost impossible, and so sure of awful punishment, that I declined to entertain the idea; though by an unbroken chain of reasoning and conjecture my inmost sense had made the matter absolutely convincing.

I turned in early that night, having vainly sought a word or two with Hayling. I wanted to tell him what I had read, what were my suspicions, and hear him deliver judgment in his cool, clear way. But it seemed as though a guard had been set about his cabin, for whenever I approached it I was sure to encounter the very man I did not wish to meet. So, feeling anything but secure about the deck after nightfall, I went below and turned in.

An hour or so after the captain and his officers congregated in the saloon, and what with laughing, singing, and joking they made a pretty hubbub. Whisky and cards I knew were going, and by the smell of things tobacco was likewise in evidence.

For about an hour the revel went on, each man taking his turn at a song or a chanty, the mate bellowing the old ballad of the

“Cuba,” with its chorus stuffed full of nautical phraseology.

“Then stand back, take in the slack!

Heave around your caps’n, gain a pawl!

’Bout ship! Stations, lads—be handy!

Let go your starboard brace—your mainsa’l haul!”

I was just flattering myself that the rascals had forgotten all about me, when some one gave the handle of my door a sudden twist. But after my first serious talk with Hayling I had taken the precaution of turning the lock. An oath proclaimed the disappointment of the would-be intruder. I felt under the pillow for my revolver and lay still. The twisting was followed by a loud rat-tat, then another oath, and then a savage kick which nearly broke in the panels. Still I thought it better not to answer, which so enraged the besieger that three or four kicks came in quick succession, and the mate’s voice was heard crying—

“Hullo! you in there!”

“Hullo!” said I.

“Are you asleep or dead?”

“Neither.”

"Then why the deuce don't you speak when you're spoken to?"

"Well, what do you want?"

"The captain is complaining about your unsociability."

"I'm sorry."

He laughed.

"So are we. Won't you come out and join us?"

"I've turned in."

"Well, turn out again."

The laughter of the other men rang out merrily, which convinced me that they were listening to our dialogue, and that they had made up their minds to plague me. Moreover, the drink was aboard, and the brutes might want humouring. It did not take me half a minute to make up my mind.

"Very well. I'll be out in a second."

I slipped on a coat over my pyjamas, nor did I forget to drop my pistol into one of the pockets. Then quickly opening the door I stepped out into the saloon with a jauntiness I was far from feeling.

At the head of the table sat Captain Macshiel. On one side of him was Mr. Gupp, on the other a dark, downy, foreign-looking man

whom I knew to be the chief engineer. Murrell, the mate, stood by the sideboard just behind the captain. Before each man was a tumbler of whisky and water, and as each was pulling vigorously at a Manila cheroot, the density of the atmosphere may be imagined.

I was greeted with uproarious cries of welcome. A cigar was shoved between my lips, a bottle of whisky placed in one hand, and a tumbler in the other.

"There you are, my lad!" cried the captain, whose little eyes were all aglow with devilment, or whisky, which is the same thing. "Drink up like a man. Here's to the good ship *Pulo Way*, and the good things she means to do."

At this there was a great pretence at hurrahing, though I could see that it was all done for my benefit. Glasses were clicked, and the Portugee began a Portuguese version of "For he's a jolly good fellow." Having no objection to drinking such a toast, I supplemented it with, "And here's to her captain and crew, and may they die peacefully in their beds like honest men!"

The toast might easily have been less am-

biguous, though, being in an irritable mood, I cared little. Still, it was received in a way which made me doubt its wisdom; for your rogue always harbours the absurd hope that he will be mistaken for an honest man. Two or three pairs of eyes fairly glared at me, and then the captain burst into a ringing laugh.

"Good!" he cried. "Capital! We are all honest men here, Mr. Ravensford, and I have no doubt that we shall all die peacefully in our beds."

Gupp looked at the Portugee and whispered; but the captain, smiling graciously, struck a match, and held it to my cheroot. Then he motioned me to a seat beside him, and, taking up a pack of cards from the table, suggested that we should have a game. As I could not well refuse, I immediately agreed. Something told me that this was a crucial moment of my life, and I settled down to play with these men, feeling as I had never felt before.

At first the game, which was loo, went smoothly enough, the captain and the mate, between whom I sat, chatting affably all the time, and plying me with whisky. Gupp and

the Portugee did little but drink and smoke, and watch the captain furtively, as if for a sign. I saw it plainly, and I knew that presently either Gupp or the engineer, whom they called Luiz, would introduce a little variety.

But in the meantime Macshiel concentrated his whole attention on me, broaching many subjects which I had a special reason for avoiding. Indeed, had I not been the possessor of sundry scruples which had clung to me from childhood, I would have been more eager to hear of the fortune which the skipper declared was mine for the asking. I knew that fortune, and guessed the way he intended to acquire it; but I played the dullard with exasperating politeness.

By degrees the game grew noisier, and I, who had been drinking rather freely, caught the infection. I cannot speak with certainty, but I believe the excitement had as much to do with my elation as the whisky. Anyway, between the two, my nervousness wore off, and I chatted and laughed as though I were one of them. But though I did not pay as much attention to the game as, in the nature of things, I ought, I still

had a sort of vague idea that Gupp and the Portugee were doing a little hanky-panky on their own account. This idea presently became a certainty, and when Luiz led the king of clubs, the very card I held in my hand, which the mate had just dealt me, I tossed it over to the Portugee, saying—

“Perhaps you’d like a pair of them, myman.”

With that I rose from the table.

The fellow also rose, and glaring furiously at me he cried, in his hollow, throaty, Portuguese way—

“What do you mean by that, you dog?”

In a moment I saw the drift of things—saw how this climax had been systematically led up to. But my own boldness amazed me.

“I mean,” said I, “that you’re a rogue, and I refuse to play with you.”

“Rogue! You call me rogue, you dog!” he screamed. “I kill you, by God! I kill you, by God!”

He raved and howled like a madman, and I wondered much why he did not fly at me.

“Come, come,” said Macshiel; “this is a serious charge, Mr. Ravensford. I think you had better apologise before it goes any further.”

"That man is a cheat, and I refuse to apologise."

"But Luiz is very excitable," he whispered confidentially, and yet with a meaning which I guessed. "He may hurt you."

"Or I him."

"Vat you say?" shrieked the fellow, his horrid black eyes working convulsively, his ugly face livid with rage.

"I say that you're a damned scoundrel, and for two pins I'd kick you out of the saloon!"

His hand, which I had noticed him slip round to his hip, was here brought to view, and in it he held a sailor's long sheath-knife. With a savage cry he leant across the table as if to stab me. But I had guessed his intention, and was prepared. Drawing quickly, I had him covered.

"If you move another inch, I'll fire!"

The fellow stood transfixed, his ugly eyes peering into the barrel of the revolver, which could not have been two feet from his forehead.

"Now, drop that knife—drop it, or by"—here I uttered a few necessary expletives—"I'll put a bullet through you!"

Caught as he was, and seeing the determination in my face, his thick lips twitched convulsively. With an angry gesture he flung the knife on the table, where it stuck quivering.

"Now, get out of this," I said, "and see that you keep out of it while I'm here."

All this was so sudden, so unexpected, that Macshiel and his companions looked on with wonder, nor did they once raise any objection to my dealing so summarily with the engineer. Indeed, for the time being, I was master of the situation, and, knowing the nature of my company, I made the most of my power. I therefore assumed a reckless, a defiant air, and delivered myself of sundry tremendous oaths; for whereas swearing but lowers a man in decent company, it exalts him in the company of the base. To hear me one would think my blood was scalding hot with indignation, and I flatter myself that I acted admirably the part of a furious fire-eater—at least I was successful. The Portugee retreated step by step, and, muttering something in his own disgusting lingo, bolted up the companion.

Turning to the captain, I smiled, and said—

"I must apologise, Captain Macshiel. But the fellow was a rogue—a fact of which you could have had not the least conception."

"Not the least," said he, with a dubious smile. "I had always thought Luiz an exceptionally honest fellow, as he is undoubtedly a first-class engineer."

"First-class," echoed the two subordinates.

"I have no wish to question his abilities as an engineer," said I loftily, "though the frequency with which we have broken down might lay him open to suspicion. For myself, I have no great liking for foreign scum, and I prefer not to meet it."

Having gone so far, I thought it just as well to carry things with a high hand. To have faltered then would have been fatal.

"Luiz must have been very drunk," said Macshiel, an uneasy smile flickering across his face. "I always knew he was inclined to be quarrelsome, but I had no idea he could so far forget himself. You are sure you are not mistaken in the cards?"

"Quite. Your friend Luiz may be an excellent specimen of the engineer, but he is not a good card-player."

"No," said he significantly, "I'm afraid

he's not. Anyway, I'm glad he didn't hurt you."

The skipper grinned unpleasantly, while his two officers stared uneasily at each other, their rogues' faces lined with anxiety. That they were totally unprepared for such a turn of affairs was obvious; indeed their disappointment was strongly marked. One wrong move would have set fire to their smouldering irritation, and I had no wish to come in closer contact with Mr. Gupp just then.

Thinking that I had done creditably under the circumstances, I wished them good-night, and with an air of splendid composure went to my room. But I knew that I had precipitated matters, and that henceforth I might expect an open enmity. Surprise and unexpected opposition had given me the victory, or, rather, I had repulsed the enemy, not vanquished him. He would come on again, next time prepared for any contingency. Well, it was a business not at all to my liking, and one I had never expected to enter; but having entered it, and started so well, I gained a little consolation from the thought that I had given my enemy some cause to respect me.

CHAPTER VII

PIRACY ON THE HIGH SEAS

I WILL not pretend that I slept well that night. Indeed, for quite two hours after turning in I scarcely attempted to close my eyes, and when I did I saw things which made me hastily open them again. A dozen times I thought I heard some one twisting the handle of my door, and quite as often my imagination enabled me to see the white, swollen face of Gupp flattened against the port. In fact, so many alarms did I pass through, that when I awoke and saw the sun shining I was surprised to find myself alive.

Breakfast, of which I took but sparingly, was spread for me as usual. But I had little inclination to eat. I was more anxious to get up on deck and have a look round.

There was no one about the after-part of the vessel, so, lighting my pipe, I leant against the rail and watched the land, which did not seem to be more than two or three miles off. Indeed I wondered much at our position, for according to the drift of the current we should long since have been out of sight. I thought of the Portugee and his engines; also of my dreams.

But presently there was great commotion forward. The captain and the mate sprang to the starboard corner of the bridge, their glasses to their eyes. A moment or two of expectancy followed, and then I heard the mate cry out at the top of his great, gruff voice—

“Forward there! All hands forward!”

Then the bo’sun blew his whistle, there was a rushing to and fro, and half a dozen men sprang upon the fo’c’sle. Gupp followed, swearing and giving directions, and I saw the men cover the gun with a great square of canvas, the ends of which were fastened carefully to the deck. Then, much to my surprise, I heard the clank of the engines, and for about half a minute we forged steadily ahead. Then there was silence again, as the ship gradually

slowed down and stopped. Needless to say I understood my dreams at last.

During this little manœuvre the captain had hardly lowered his glasses, and though at first I could make out nothing, gradually a little dark cloud began to form upon the eastern horizon. At first it was so thin and indistinct that I should not have noticed it if left to myself; but as I watched it perceptibly assumed a deeper shade and stretched further across the heavens. Like a long wisp of cloud it seemed, a thing that had no business in the perfectly clear sky, and as I watched I knew what it meant. It was a cloud, truly, but a cloud of smoke cast up by some steamer which was not yet in sight.

The men all crowded to the starboard side and turned anxiously to the far horizon; even the Portugee Luiz crawled up from his reeking engine-room, and hung his ugly, dirty face over the side. I darted below for my glasses, and while there I slipped a small box of cartridges into my pocket. When I reached the deck again the topmasts of the steamer were distinctly visible.

I filled my pipe and tried patiently to await the development of events; but though I may

have preserved an outward appearance of calm, inwardly I was throbbing with excitement. Each minute that passed seemed multiplied by ten, and when at length the hull of the advancing vessel began to loom up, and I saw that she was coming towards us, I felt as though the fate of the whole world was hanging on the issue.

Presently Hayling came aft, a bundle of flags under his arm, and as he began to knot them to the signalling halliards I crossed over to him. The big fellow looked exceedingly solemn; I felt so. As he nodded to me there was never the ghost of a smile on his hard face.

"What are you going to do, Hayling?"

"Signal to that vessel that we are badly in need of help."

I advanced still closer to him.

"What does this mean, old fellow?"

"Can't you guess?" said he, still busy with the flags.

"I dare not."

He laughed between his teeth.

"My dear Ravensford, we're going to stop that ship, and sink her, too, if she gives any trouble."

“Piracy !”

“That’s about it.” Again he laughed, and I thought his face looked fiendish.

“What ship is it ?” I asked.

“I haven’t the faintest notion, but I think you will find that she is bound from Sydney to Hong Kong.”

“The *Chung-Tong* left Sydney on the 25th of last month with fifty thousand pounds in gold on board.”

“How do you know ?” said he sharply.

In as few words as possible I told him how I had become possessed of the information.

“Then depend upon it, Ravensford, that vessel is the *Chung-Tong*.”

By this time he had arranged the flags correctly, and just as he was hoisting them the captain, Murrell, and half a dozen men came aft in a body. Hayling did not look at me, but under his breath I heard him mutter, “Be careful. They are ripe for anything.” I slipped my hands into my coat pockets and assumed my best air of indifference. In one of the pockets was a revolver, and my finger instantly curled round the trigger.

The men stood back by the bulwarks, where

they formed an evil-looking group of cut-throats; Macshiel and the mate advanced.

Looking up at the flags, then at the far-off ship, which every minute loomed up clearer, the skipper said, "You see that ship?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Can you guess her name?"

"The *Chung-Tong*," said I, somewhat defiantly.

"Good!" and his devilish little face seemed to wrinkle with pleasure. "Perhaps you can also guess where she comes from?"

"Sydney."

"And what she carries?"

"Fifty thousand pounds in gold."

"Where she is bound for?"

"Hong Kong."

"No!"

"Where, then?"

"Hell!"

I started, taken clean off my guard. The man's face suddenly grew wrinkled and hideous, like a monkey's, and he seemed passionately to spit the word out.

"I hope not," said I.

"Well," he replied, "it's a pity, of course; but before she goes we are going to ask her to

leave her gold behind. It will be no use in the port she's bound for."

"Melt," grinned the mate.

"None whatever," said I, replying to the captain. "I think yours is a perfectly reasonable request."

"I hope so," said he, with a nasty laugh. "Are you with us?"

"First let me know your project," said I, hoping in a vague sort of way that the time gained might prove beneficial.

"We intend to get hold of that fifty thousand. It ought to set us up for life."

"How many of you?"

His brows went together, and he scowled frightfully. I had spoken rather loudly.

"There is enough for all," said he, in a low, meaning voice.

"But suppose her captain refuses to part?"

"We shall make him."

"How?"

"We have a gun forward, and our third mate, Mr. Gupp, was once a gunner in the Royal Navy."

"Then you will sink her unless she surrenders?"

"Precisely."

"It's a desperate enterprise, Captain Macshiel."

He grinned hideously, while the mate and the men began to show signs of impatience. Evidently they thought enough had been said. It was time to act.

The captain, advancing a step nearer, peered into my face.

"Will you join us?"

"But this is piracy."

"Never mind what it is," said he. "Will you join us?"

"No, I will not."

"Then you understand that we have no room for traitors aboard?"

The faces of those before me grew black and threatening, and I really believed a rush was imminent. I covered Macshiel with my concealed pistol, and felt sure that I could put a bullet somewhere through his body. He saw the movement, and, guessing what it meant, stepped back, a start of surprise and annoyance twitching his cadaverous jaws. And, truly, at that moment he was bound for the same port as the *Chung-Tong*.

An angry look swept into his eyes, and he said, with a horrid grin—

"What have you got your hands in your pockets for?"

"To keep them warm."

"Then up with them. I'm the master here."

"Captain Macshiel," I said, "I have no quarrel with you—I have no wish to quarrel with any one. I candidly admit that I am not a fighting-man, nor has fighting ever come my way before; but, so help my God, I'll do my best to injure the man who tries to injure me."

It was a bit of bounce, and yet not altogether bounce. I knew the men were desperate, and that they would not hesitate to sacrifice me if I endeavoured to thwart them. The alternative was therefore given me—and yet what an alternative! To join them, even against my will, would be to make me equally guilty in the eyes of the law. Not to join them meant that there was no room for me aboard the *Pulo Way*. Therefore the bounce was not all bounce; there was a deadly seriousness underlying it as befitted such an occasion, which I think Macshiel was quick to see. Or perhaps the knowledge that between him and a bullet there was only the lining of my coat may have quickened his perception.

"Nobody wants to injure you," said he, with a conciliatory grin. "What the deuce do you take us for? Though driven desperate we are not wholly without reason. We have cried for justice, but justice is deaf as well as blind. I don't want to prate or preach; but I can tell you that we are just sick of things, and that now we mean to live—to live, if it's only for a month!"

So this was a new phase of Captain Macshiel's character. But his sophistries fell on unsympathetic ears.

"To live for a month is good. And after?"

He laughed harshly. "To live still; for we intend to render detection impossible. It's as good as five thousand pounds in your pocket. What do you say?"

"I have said."

"Very well;" and this time he smiled very wickedly. "We'll make you one of us in spite of you. Now lads," cried he, turning to the men, "to quarters. In half an hour we shall all be rich men." He waved his hand and drove them forward, while I slunk away aft, a prey to the most distressing emotions.

The ship, a long, low, one-funnel boat with a projecting bow, came sweeping up grandly

out of the ocean. For some time now she had seen us, and when she was near enough to read our signal her helm was put over and she bore straight down upon us. Poor beggars! Eager to help, how they would have shunned us had they only known!

On she came, straight for us, like an animal ready to spring over the white hedge of foam which for ever seemed to block her way. The red ensign went up, and presently she signalled, "Can I be of any assistance?" The mate here came rushing aft, and ran up the pennant "Yes." There followed an immediate bustle aboard the liner, and I saw some men spring to the davits on the port side and begin to clear the falls. Then the wash before her bows subsided, and I knew that the engines had stopped. Through my glasses I could see distinctly the officers on the bridge and several persons leaning over the rail aft. As soon as she was near enough for me to distinguish her name, which was written in big brass letters upon her bows, I read the words *Chung-Tong*.

I admit the singularity of it all deeply impressed me, and I knew not at which I wondered most, man's ingenuity or his perfidy.

The electric wire had told the people in China that the *Chung-Tong* had left Sydney with fifty thousand pounds on board. The next day the newspapers had printed it; a man had read the paragraph: it awoke an idea, and the idea had been duly executed. And now here was this very vessel coming up out of the sea to her destruction.

She stopped less than a quarter of a mile off, and the people on her deck were plainly visible to the naked eye. With glasses I could even distinguish the uniform of the officers, while to my dismay I saw some women among the people aft.

But now the boat of which I have spoken was lowered from the liner; four or five men slipped down the falls, and presently the little craft shot out from the big one and came towards us. In the stern sat an officer; in the bows knelt a man with a boathook, while four more rowed.

The sea being smooth, the little boat skipped gallantly across the water, and presently she was brought to a few yards away from us, and just opposite the bridge upon which the captain stood.

"What ship is this?" I heard the young

officer ask, who vainly scrutinised our bows for the name, which had been painted out some three or four days previously.

"The *Golden Guinea*," shouted Macshiel, "from Shanghai to the Torres Straits. What are you?"

"The *Chung-Tong*—Sydney to Hong Kong. What can we do for you?"

"I'll tell you," said the old man, leaning far out over the rail. "We intend to do a little trading among the islands, but being a bit short of cash, we thought you wouldn't object to lending us a little."

"Eh?" said the young fellow, looking exceedingly astonished.

"I believe you have something like fifty thousand pounds on board. You must hand it over."

The look of stupefaction on the young fellow's face was almost ludicrous. This was evidently the last request he had expected.

"Why, confound you," he said, "you must be mad!"

"So mad," said Macshiel grimly, "that if you don't hand it over I'll sink you."

"Very well," was the reply; "I'll report."

"I'll give your captain five minutes to

decide from the time you reach the deck. If the pennant 'Yes' doesn't go up, then I'll open fire. And no hanky-panky, mind. This is going to be a big job."

Without more ado the young fellow put about and made straight for his ship, while Gupp uncovered the cannon forward and took his place beside it. For the first time I felt the excitement of battle in my blood. It would be an ignoble battle, no doubt; but I fancied there would be some desperate work done.

I saw the young officer swarm up the side of the liner and immediately make his way forward to the bridge, where the captain still stood. Then I turned to Macshiel, who, after looking at his watch, went and rang the engineer to stand by. Things were hurrying to a climax. I knew the men of the *Pulo Way* were desperate and resolved; I knew they would have the gold or such revenge as it was possible for them to take. The question was, could the *Chung-Tong* resist us with any hope of success?

Eagerly I watched the little group on her bridge, and presently the captain began to gesticulate wildly. Then I saw him point to



"There was a short interval between the first and second shot."

The Voyage of the "Pulo Way."]

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the engine-room telegraph, and a few seconds after the water began to bubble round her stern. Captain Macshiel immediately flew to our telegraph, and then came the low throb, throb of our own engines.

“Wing him, Gupp!” I heard the skipper shout. “The beggar’s going to try to give us the slip.”

It so happened that at that moment an awkward angle prevented Mr. Gupp from getting the gun into play, and when at length he did the *Chung-Tong* was stern on and steaming like mad. I knew by report that she was a good two or three knots faster than we were, and if she could only keep us off for something like half an hour she might defy the *Pulo Way*.

But the gunner lost no time. Setting about his business in the most approved manner, the boom of the gun told me that the fight had begun. The shot, however, flew high of the mark and splashed into the sea some distance ahead. Gupp laughed uproariously as he loaded again, and I could see the very devil of mischief frolicking over his big face.

There was but a short interval between the first and the second shot. A puff of smoke, a

sharp crack forward as of the atmosphere suddenly exploding, and then all eyes flew to the liner. Almost at the selfsame moment the rail about her port quarter was seen flying in all directions. The captain kicked up his heels with delight and yelled out, "Bravo, Gupp! Give it to him again!"

Gupp, who I no longer doubted had learnt his gunnery at the expense of the nation, waved his hand as he sent forth a big laugh. Absorbed in his work, I don't believe he gave a moment's reflection to the horror of his act. He was an enthusiast with only one thought—to make the best play possible with his gun.

The third shot, from the gunner's point of view, was even better than the second. It struck the high skylight of the poop, and, exploding with a horrid noise, sent the splinters flying in all directions. The fourth missed; but the fifth shattered a boat that swung on the port davits, and destroyed the mizzen shrouds.

This last shot must have proved conclusively to the captain of the liner that in the gunner of the *Pulo Way* he had a dangerous man to deal with, so without more ado he hoisted the signal of surrender and stopped

his engines. We passed very close to him—so close that Captain Macshiel leant over the rail of the bridge and bellowed, “Get the stuff ready. I’ll send a boat alongside in a minute.”

We came to about three hundred yards away, always manœuvring so as to keep our bow on. Then some of the men rushed aft so as to lower the starboard boat, which piece of work Hayling superintended. I tried to catch his eye, for very obvious reasons, but never once did he turn my way. It seemed as though he purposely wished to avoid me.

Presently the mate came along, and as his eyes caught mine I saw that his face was all aglow with a quiet, devilish sort of delight.

“Now, then, bustle along, you there!” he cried. “Get ready to go in the boat, and make yourself useful.”

“You seem to forget that I am a passenger.”

“We have no passengers aboard the *Pulo Way*,” he answered significantly. “You are either for us or against us—which is it?”

“I prefer to remain neutral.”

“There can be no neutrality,” he blustered. “Into that boat you go, or——”

"Or what?"

He grinned consumedly. It was a joke in ten thousand.

"Don't you be so bally obstinate," he said. "For some reason best known to himself, the old man seems bent upon making a pet of you. But we mean business this time, and you may take my word for it the old man is not the most patient soul afloat."

It was a close corner, and one out of which I failed to see my way. I looked at the liner yonder, the men about me—the one was as helpless as I, the other ready for anything. Just then I caught a look in Hayling's eye which somewhat reassured me.

"Very well," I said, "I will go, but under protest."

"Oh, that's all right," he replied, with a disagreeable laugh. "I'll duly enter it in the log."

By this time the boat was lowered and swinging clear of the ship, and at a sign from the mate I sprang upon the rail, seized one of the ropes, and slid down into her. Hayling made room for me beside him in the stern. Half a dozen men scrambled down, and we pushed off.

Before us lay the liner, a great black mass of iron, her side crowded with an eager throng. Hayling kept a stiff upper lip, and stared coldly ahead of him ; but it seemed to me as though each eye looked unutterable scorn, while each tongue framed the horrid word, "Thief! thief!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAST OF THE LINER

HAYLING and I sat together in the stern, he grimly mute, I bursting with surmise. His right hand grasped the tiller, and he fixed his keen eyes steadily ahead. The man who rowed stroke, our bo'sun, or Number One, a big, gaunt specimen of the northern Chinaman, grinned meaningly at me from time to time. An impertinent grin it was, and one that I might have resented in another place. But, guessing the fellow's thoughts, and why he had been sent with us, I kept my temper. As I turned to look at our ship, I whispered to Hayling—

“You are not one of them?”

“In the way that you are,” he replied, without looking.

"Can't we board this vessel?"

He shook his head. "Impossible. She would be sunk in ten minutes."

I felt that this was true, and thought some unkind things of Mr. Gupp. Our bo'sun grinned unpleasantly, as though he understood. I was not then aware of the concealed weapons on the men, nor did I imagine that at our first attempt to fly those weapons would have been used against us.

About a dozen yards from the *Chung-Tong* Hayling called to the men to stop, and then, standing up in the boat, he saluted the captain, a middle-aged, brown-bearded man, with a fat, choleric face.

"You have fifty thousand pounds on board?" he cried brusquely.

"Well?" answered the captain, whose rage was so great that he could scarcely control himself.

"I am very sorry, sir," said Hayling, "but my orders are imperative. You must hand it over."

"And if I refuse?"

"We shall probably send you to the bottom."

The man's face grew absolutely purple, and

he clutched the rail convulsively. A very torrent of passion raged within him.

"And if I hand you over the money?"

"You will be at liberty to proceed on your voyage."

He turned to the little group which surrounded him, though he especially addressed his remarks to a distinguished-looking, grey-headed man who seemed to be a passenger of consequence. For a few moments several excited voices were heard, and then the captain turned to us.

"I accept your terms," he bellowed; "but if it wasn't for my passengers I'd see you damned!"

Hayling saluted, replying coldly, "When you've got the boxes up I'll come alongside to receive them."

Much bustling and excitement followed, particularly among the passengers aft. There were several of these, among whom I noticed a woman, a young girl of about twenty, whose fair hair shone brilliantly in the sunlight, and whose face, notwithstanding its eager, terrified expression, was one of singular sweetness. The aforementioned distinguished-looking old gentleman came aft and spoke to her, and

tried to lead her below ; but she shook her head without turning, fixing us with such a look of horror that I could have jumped overboard for shame.

"Damn that girl!" muttered Hayling. "Why doesn't she go below?"

I couldn't say, but I sympathised with our worthy second mate.

Presently a man came to the side and waved for us to approach, and in him I recognised the young officer who had come off to the *Pulo Way*. As we drew near we passed just under where the young girl stood, and though I knew what I might expect, I could not help looking. Neither could Hayling. Yet one quick glance was quite enough. I think there were not at that moment two more contemptible men on the high seas than Hayling and I. I looked at him, but his lips had gone close together, and his face had grown grimly repellent.

We came alongside just where the officer stood, and quickly the first box, securely slung in a net, was lowered to us.

"There ought to be ten of these boxes," said Hayling, in his roughest, gruffest voice.

"Quite right," said the officer, looking hard

at my companion. Hayling dropped his eyes; but the other, leaning further over, said in an altered tone—a tone not unmixed with curiosity—

“I say.”

“Well?” said Hayling, without looking up.

“Did you ever know a fellow called Frank Hayling?”

“No,” was the abrupt reply. But the face of the second mate grew harder than ever.

“You wouldn’t. He was an honest man.”

An ominous cloud darkened my companion’s face, but beyond a quick dilating of the nostrils he gave no other sign of being stung by the taunt. Yet why had he refused to admit to his identity? Equivocal as was his position, it was none of his choosing. Against it he might have struggled in vain.

But in the meantime the specie had been passed over the side until the whole ten boxes lay at our feet; then, without more ado, the men got out their oars, and amid the jeers and execrations of those aboard the Australian liner we put about for our ship.

“I suppose I can go now?” yelled the captain.

“Not until we signal you permission,” said Hayling.

As I looked up I encountered a row of angry faces; but my eyes only rested on one—the white, scared face aft, with its nimbus of golden hair.

As we rowed back to the *Pulo Way* my companion turned to me.

“What a strange little world this is! That fellow who spoke to me was once a shipmate of mine.”

“Then why did you deny your identity?”

“Cussedness, I suppose—or some scruple as to letting my friends know that I have turned pirate.”

“All the same, it’s a pity we didn’t try to get aboard.”

“There would then have been no hope for the *Chung-Tong*. Look ahead.”

On the fo’c’s’le-head stood Mr. Gupp beside his gun, the gun itself trained upon the unfortunate liner. I saw and understood; but all the same I deeply regretted having to return to the *Pulo Way*.

“Did you see that girl aft?” I asked.

“See her!” he echoed. “I don’t think I shall ever forget her scared, white face, her

look of utter abhorrence. What unmitigated scoundrels she must think us ! ”

“ What unmitigated scoundrels we are ! But she was very lovely. ”

“ Too lovely to go to the bottom, ” said he.

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ If I hadn’t seen her I should have tried to get aboard the *Chung-Tong*. ”

I followed the drift of his thoughts, and while I duly admired the self-sacrifice I could not help thinking him over-scrupulous. Once on board the *Chung-Tong* we might have got away, or offered such resistance as would have given Captain Macshiel a distaste for piracy of the more adventurous order ; but once back aboard the *Pulo Way* we would be entirely at the mercy of a crew of successful desperadoes. Well, it was too late now. The chance, if chance it were, had gone, and we had to face the future with what cheerfulness we could command.

A few more strokes brought us alongside the old packet, and in an incredibly short space of time the specie was transferred from our boat to the deck. As soon as all was clear I clambered up the side, and there upon the deck I beheld the carpenter hard at work upon one of

the boxes with a chisel and a hammer. In less than a minute he had the iron binding off, the end open, and the sovereigns, neatly packed, were exposed to view.

The mate, who had been superintending this interesting performance, immediately turned to the captain, who was still on the bridge, and shouted out, "All right, sir!" The old man waved his hand, and even at that distance I saw the horrid grin that spread itself over his ugly face. Then the mate had the box fastened up again and the whole of the plunder carried below.

By this time the boat had been hauled up, to which piece of work I lent a hand. Indeed, willy-nilly, I seemed to be doing my best to further my apprenticeship in the piratical trade. There was grim old Hayling laying on to the rope with all his might, and so, perforce, I laid on too, without much thinking; though it might not have been so hard to guess the reason of the apparent acquiescence of the big Australian.

But on once more turning to take another peep at the *Chung-Tong* I was somewhat astonished to see how close we were drawing; for now that we had plundered the ship there

was no necessity to kiss before saying good-bye. Being entirely unprepared for what was about to follow, I was beginning to feel a little curious as to the meaning of the movement, when the gun forward rang out.

At first the full significance of the act did not appear obvious; but when it was followed by the utmost consternation aboard the liner, I realised in full the horror of it all. Nor did it need the second shot, which quickly followed the first, to convince me of the fiendish intention of Macshiel. I saw the shell explode low down by the side of the *Chung-Tong*, and by the way her officers crowded to that particular portion of the bulwarks and looked anxiously over, I knew that she had been badly hit.

Turning, I saw Hayling beside me. White wrath showed up through his dark skin; there was a nasty glitter in his eyes. Yet his voice was calm and icily cold when he spoke.

"This is a pretty business, Ravensford."

"They mean to sink her?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But, Hayling, might we not protest?"

"We might; but it wouldn't be of the slightest use. They must sink the *Chung-*

Tong if they hope to escape detection. Who, then, is to know how she went down? Indeed, from their point of view, it is the only thing they can do. Protesting is useless. There are quite fifteen men forward, all fully armed."

"But, good Heavens, we can't stand by and see this done!"

"We must—unless we want to go down with her. Much better live in the hope of bringing these scoundrels to book. See, she's under way at last," and he pointed to the bubbling water just under her counter; "but too late, I fear—too late."

Too late indeed, for just then another shot rang out, and we knew that the helpless vessel had again been badly hit. Hayling's indifference suddenly gave way to a fierce outburst of passion. He ground his teeth and shook his huge fist in the direction of Mr. Gupp.

"Damn that fellow!" he hissed; "I'll be even with him yet."

He turned from me and searched intently every point of the horizon. But coming back again he shook his head. "Nothing in sight, old man. It's all up with the *Chung-Tong*."

It was horrible to stand there and watch the slow consummation of such a dastardly piece of work ; more horrible still to feel one's inability to prevent it. Yet, as Hayling had truly said, protesting was useless ; and if we had been rash enough to protest with force, it would have given Captain Macshiel a decent pretext for doing that which he had previously failed to accomplish.

But in the meantime the wildest excitement prevailed aboard the liner, which now was under full steam and steering almost due north. People rushed excitedly up and down her decks, while the crew lowered some sheets of canvas over the side, with the evident intention of plugging the hole. Indeed, one man was swung over in a sling, and I saw that he held a long stick in his hand with which he kept forcing the canvas into the leak. He made a pretty target as he swung there clear of the ship ; but I prayed inwardly that the rascals forward might not think as I thought, and that the brave fellow might succeed in his arduous task.

Alas ! Just at that moment the sharp crack of a rifle rang out. For a second or so I hoped the man had not been hit ; but suddenly he

drew himself up and clutched his sling tightly, and as he did so the stick slipped from his hands. There was an immediate stir among the men who were watching him, and rapidly they began to haul him up. But, quick as they were, they were not quick enough. Ere he had been drawn little more than half-way up the side his hands slipped, and with a splash he fell backwards into the sea. Our sharp stem nearly struck him as we came on in the wake of the *Chung-Tong*, and looking over the side I saw his dead white face whiz by.

But during all this time neither Mr. Gupp nor his gun had been idle, and the *Chung-Tong*, though she gained on us at first, soon slackened down; for the water was making great headway upon her, and she was already rapidly sinking by the bows. Indeed, as we drew off and watched we saw her stern gradually rise until her propeller stood almost clear of the water. Then the escape pipes were opened and the steam came up in a huge cloud, making a great roaring and hissing. But wise as was the act, it came too late. Almost before we knew what had happened there was a terrific explosion, and

the *Chung-Tong* was enveloped in smoke and steam. When they cleared away there was nothing left of the big liner but a lot of wreckage.

Hayling, who had stood beside me during the whole of this awful scene, here uttered a great cry, as of a beast mad with pain. Then with a fearful oath he bounded forward, I at his heels.

"Damn you!" he yelled, shaking his fist at the captain, who still stood on the bridge. "You shall pay for this, Macshiel!" He was about to swarm up the steps which led to the bridge, when I seized him by the arm. Turning on me savagely, I believe he would have struck me had I not swung him on one side.

Macshiel poked his ugly little face over the rail, and I saw that it was hideously livid with excitement.

"Take that fool below," he cried out sharply. "I'll speak to him presently."

But Hayling, who seemed half mad with horror and excitement, continued to say some extremely foolish things. I saw the captain's eyes harden, and judging his movements, guessed what was coming. Nor did I draw Hayling aside a moment too soon. The bullet,

which spent itself in the deck a few yards away, would certainly have gone clean through him.

"For God's sake, Hayling," I implored, "come aft and try to contain yourself. You can do no good here, and they are in no mood to brook interference."

He looked at me, and a strange smile played in his eyes.

"I admit it, old man; I am an infernal fool. But I could have gone for an army then."

By this time we were well abreast of the engine-room skylight, and consequently in no immediate danger from the captain, who, fortunately for us, had other work in hand.

As the *Pulo Way* began to move slowly towards the wreckage, we saw that those who had not been carried down with her, or who had not been blown up, were clinging to the promiscuous bits of timber which were floating about. Some even had their lifebelts on, and as they bobbed up and down they frantically waved to us, and called for help in the most heartrending fashion. I think I must have counted some eight or nine persons in the water, and I was beginning to wonder what Captain Macshiel would do with them, when I

saw the two nearest us let go the spar to which they were clinging and begin to swim towards us. They were two white men, the young officer who had recognised Hayling being one; the other was a pale-faced fellow, who looked like a fireman or a greaser.

On they came in gallant fashion, though encumbered with their clothes, until they were within some twenty yards of us, and I could already see the alternate flashes of hope and despair which swept their faces. Then of a sudden two shots rang out almost simultaneously. The pale-faced man clapped his hand to his face, and the moment before he sank I saw the red blood trickle through his fingers. The young officer wildly threw up his arms, and half rose out of the water. As he did so he showed a crimson mark on his throat.

What followed was horrible beyond words. Shot after shot rang out, and one after another the poor wretches let go their hold and sank. Unable longer to witness this fearful massacre, I turned away and hid my face in my hands. But though I might shut out the actual sight, I could not shut out the memory of it; and I know not which was the harder to bear, the seeing or the imagination.

Hayling came across to me and dragged me back to the side, and without speaking pointed to an object which floated some little distance ahead. At first I thought it was a new, bright kind of seaweed, but the sun, flashing on it as it rose on the crest of a swell, showed it to be a woman's hair.

"God Almighty!"

It was the girl, the girl with the white, scared face who had watched us from the poop of the *Chung-Tong*; and even as written here the exclamation escaped me.

"I'm going forward," said Hayling; and I knew that the man who shot at her would have to answer to the second mate. I, just as excited as he, bounded after him, and as I passed under the break of the bridge I heard Gupp yell out:

"Don't shoot at her! She's alive!"

CHAPTER IX

OUR LADY OF THE SEA

THE captain perked up his ears and grinned unpleasantly, but he never countermanded the order.

"Starboard a little, sir," cried Gupp, who seemed to be greatly excited. "Steady! Now we'll soon have her aboard."

Slowly, at a snail's pace, the great ship crept up to the little bit of unconscious life encased in its huge cork belt. Her beautiful hair, like trailing seaweed, floated upon the water; her exquisite face was white and drawn with all the horror of death.

Gupp, who was hanging over the bows, a most surprising eagerness in his big face, once more yelled out the direction, and presently we saw the white face drift by our sharp cut-

water. Then, as we slowly forged past, the man who had gone down over the side seized her, and in a few moments she was up on deck.

Here I immediately pushed forward and took command, for I knew something of such things, having once seriously studied medicine. Strange to say, the men stood back without a murmur, while Hayling and I set to work to restore animation.

At first we were in some doubt as to her recovery, though I am pleased to say that doubt did not assail us long. After a dose of brandy, and sundry other little attentions, her bosom began to heave, and her breath came in quick, convulsive gasps. Then her eyes opened, and when she beheld the men about her I saw the indecision flicker across her face, and I knew for the moment that she doubted if she were really alive.

"It's all right," said Hayling softly, still continuing to stroke her hand. "You are quite safe and among friends."

But I knew by the way her eyes flew from one face to the other that she did not quite understand.

"Where is my father?" she said at last.

I could not answer, and so turned my face away from her imploring eyes—eyes which were deep and blue as the sea, and full of a pathos that made me quiver.

"I daresay he is well," said Hayling. "We shall see presently."

An odd, penetrating look came into her eyes. She stared at him intently.

"Who are you?" she gasped, sitting up with an effort.

"A friend," said he.

"I know!" she cried, intense fear and abhorrence leaping to her face. "You are the thief who came in the boat. You are going to kill me!"

"No, no," he said gently. "You are with friends." Yet I knew that her words froze all the manhood in him.

But she would not be pacified.

"You are a bad man!" she cried. "Will no one save me?"

He turned rather pale, but after a momentary struggle with the lump in his throat, said—

"You must not talk any more now. Let me take you to your cabin."

"No, not with you," she cried, struggling violently. "I appeal to these gentlemen."

He got up with a sad, grave smile, and beckoned to me.

"Take her to my cabin," he whispered.

Gupp and I raised her, and between us we escorted her to Hayling's room, she directing towards him a parting glance of unallayed mistrust.

"Where are you taking me?" she said.

"This is not the *Chung-Tong*?"

"No, miss," said Gupp.

"Then why am I here?"

Gupp explained. "The *Chung-Tong* has sailed away, miss."

"Sailed away! Where am I? How did I come here?"

"Must have fallen overboard," said the man.

She looked hard at him in the same confused way. Then of a sudden her memory came back to her.

"I know," she cried. "You are the pirates!"

"Pray do not distress yourself," I said. "Some of us are what we could not help being. You shall hear the whole story when you are stronger. In the meantime try to believe that you are among those who will do their best to protect you."

Talking thus, I got her into Hayling's cabin, and seeing that she was well enough to be left alone, I told her what to do, and then withdrew, dragging Mr. Gupp with me.

"Lord," said he, "that's a girl!"

There was so much admiration in his voice that I had to swing round and look at him. As I did so his eyes met mine, and I thought he looked embarrassed.

"Yes; but she won't have you to thank for much."

"I don't see it. If it wasn't for me she wouldn't be alive now."

"She might be better off."

"You don't understand gratitude," he snarled. "You must be taught."

Foreseeing the folly of a further quarrel with him, I merely shook my head and walked aft; for I knew that I was only allowed aboard on sufferance, and that my enemies would not neglect the first opportunity of sending me where they had sent the Australian liner.

The ship was now going at full speed, and curiosity taking me into the wheelhouse aft, I saw by the compass that we were steering almost due south, or in the direction from

whence the *Chung-Tong* had come. Therefore, bidding goodbye to all thought of ever seeing Manila, I tried to bear myself with fortitude, to be prepared for any emergency, and to hope that in some inexplicable way things would right themselves. Wherever we went, the voyage for me would mean an unceasing vigil. Somehow I never hoped to see the end of it; but, nevertheless, I meant to proceed with the utmost caution in my speech and actions. Yet scarcely had I inwardly vowed this good resolution before I seemed bent on breaking it.

The captain, having set the course, came aft in company with the mate, and as he approached me he saluted ironically.

"Well," he sneered, "have you got over your qualms yet?"

"This is no affair of mine, Captain Macshiel."

"I think you'll find it is," said he. "You're one of us, whether you like it or not;" and, immensely tickled with the thought, he banged the mate playfully on the back.

"I am not one of you, nor will I touch a penny of the plunder."

He laughed again. "That's neither here

nor there. If we swing, I'll take jolly good care that you keep us company."

"I think not," said I.

His eyes grew ugly, and he drew down his forehead like a monkey. I was a fool to cross him at such a moment, but the devil himself wouldn't have frightened me just then.

"You're with us or you're not," said he. Then he smiled malevolently. "Upon my soul, I don't know why I don't drop you over the side." But I saw his evil little eyes wander to the right-hand pocket of my coat, and I guessed the reason.

"Well," grinned the mate, "he may as well be drowned as frightened to death."

"But I have hopes of him," replied Macshiel, with a meaning smile. Then changing his bantering tone, he said, sharply, "Look here, they tell me you're a bit of a doctor?"

"A very little bit."

"Then there's a man sick forward. Go and see what you can do for him."

There was, of course, nothing to do but to obey; and as, fortunately, the man was only suffering from a very mild distemper I soon had him about. This gave me a sort of standing on board, and for a little while relieved

me of the tyranny of those with whom I had the misfortune to sail.

In the meantime the ship, swinging steadily on her course, worked her way down the more open waters of the Sulu Sea. Hitherto, the men had gone secretly about the decks, as though living beneath the shadow of their awful crime; but once the scene of the outrage was left far behind, and the ship stole further and further into the open sea, the spirits of those on board seemed to improve. There was much free drinking among the officers and crew, the latter frequently finding their way aft, and loitering about in a manner that set all discipline at defiance. Whenever the captain appeared he made a great pretence of bundling them forward, but it was done in a way which they were not likely to resent.

During this time I saw little of Hayling, who still continued to discharge the duties of second mate. We knew that we were objects of suspicion, and while under the present *régime* thought it wiser to adopt a policy of the utmost circumspection.

But of the solitary survivor of the *Chung-Tong* I saw a great deal. Indeed, acting as I did the part of a physician, which at first

she really thought me, I was constantly brought in contact with her; and you may be sure I lost no time in letting her know the true position on board of Hayling and myself. The first night only, while her clothes were getting dried, she spent in his room. Then, after I had made certain representations to the captain, he placed one of the best cabins in the saloon at her disposal, and I will add that he treated her with the utmost consideration. Had she been a lady passenger of distinction, and he the courteous commander of a mail-boat, he could not have behaved with greater tact or decorum. Whenever she came on deck he always placed his own lounge chair at her disposal, performing that little attention with a nicety which left nothing to be desired. Sometimes he would come from below with a bottle of sweets as a peace-offering; at others the bribe took the form of biscuits or fruit. Incongruous, undoubtedly, but worthy of something more than a passing thought. Indeed, by many a little act he sought in his own rough way to show her that he did not war on defenceless girls, though they might suffer in the change of things.

As for the girl herself, it was some time before she had recovered sufficiently from the shock to be able to speak with any composure of the past. Then her history proved but a brief one. She was an English girl—a Londoner, in fact—who had set out with her father, who was a retired banker, on a trip round the world. They had passed through the Continent to Egypt, and from Suez had gone on to Bombay and Colombo, whence they took ship to Australia. Adelaide, Melbourne, and Sydney had been visited in turn, and at the last-named port they joined the *Chung-Tong*. Their intention was to spend a few weeks in China and Japan, and thence cross to America, but, as we have seen, Captain Macshiel and his associates decided otherwise.

All this she told me as we sat together on the deck the first day of her convalescence, and though I spared her all unnecessary detail of our brutal attack, I pointed out that by no possibility could any but herself be alive. This I impressed upon her, because she seemed to hug the delusion that her father had escaped. Indeed, she seemed to think that he could not possibly die, enjoying

the most blind belief in the resource and intrepidity of fate. As though fate could keep a man afloat when he had no support but salt water!

But in her own quiet way she seemed a brave, determined sort of girl, and though the mention of her father's name always brought the tears to her eyes, she bore the novelty of her equivocal position with surprising equanimity. Towards the captain, who, as I have said, treated her with the utmost civility, she acted with commendable tact. Indeed, I will not say I did not suggest this line of conduct, though she frequently surprised me by a unique display of ability in carrying it through. The mate never troubled her beyond "Good morning, miss," though Mr. Gupp displayed an ardour which under other circumstances might have been commendable. As for poor Hayling, she at first seemed to regard him as a most abandoned ruffian, and it necessitated a somewhat prolonged play of my persuasive powers to convince her to the contrary.

"I, shall never forget how stern he looked as he sat in the boat," she said, "or how sharply he spoke to poor Captain White."

"I saw you watching him."

"He fascinated me. I could not help thinking of the faces in the rock carvings we had seen in Egypt. You are sure he is not a wicked man?"

I could not help smiling at the ingenuous query.

"I know little of him, Miss Waltham"—for such was her name—"but from the little I do know, there is no man in the world whom I would sooner trust."

"Perhaps I don't do him justice," she said. "I was horribly frightened, and he has such a strange, grim face. I am sure his ancestors must have come out of Egypt."

Just then the subject of our conversation came aft, and as he approached I saw her eyes fly to his face, and I noticed her mouth quiver. I beckoned him over and introduced him in the orthodox style—"Miss Waltham, this is our second officer, Mr. Hayling." Hayling raised his cap and looked decidedly uncomfortable, while the girl strove her hardest to atone for past misconduct. A few commonplace remarks, a few congratulatory words from him respecting her rescue and recovery, and then with a smile he was

gone. But I noticed that her eyes rarely left his face, and that when he went away they instinctively followed him.

"I think you may be right," she said. "Your friend's eyes are almost timid."

"He is not the bloodthirsty ruffian you imagined?" I inquired, somewhat quizzingly.

"How could I have been so foolish? What does he think of me?"

"Everything that you could wish."

"But I called him such horrid names!"

"And what do you think he calls you?"

"Tell me."

"Our Lady of the Sea."

"Oh," she said, evidently much affected, "I am so sorry. I beg his pardon—a thousand times."

So that was all right. Having once looked fairly into Hayling's eyes, she had seen what ought to have been patent to the meanest intelligence—an honesty coupled with a most curious self-dependence. Indeed, inside of twenty-four hours she was to experience a sensation entirely new to her, and gather a few more impressions concerning the big Australian.

Thanks to the unexpected courtesy of Cap-

tain Macshiel, the girl's life was made as easy as circumstances would permit; but Macshiel, though ostensibly the commander, had lost something of his power since he had openly taken to evil ways. This was quickly seen in the changed manner of the junior officers, and the way they hung about the after-deck—not to mention an occasional excursion aft on the part of the more presumptuous of the men. More particularly was this noticeable in the behaviour of the man Gupp. This fellow was an excellent specimen of the bully order—a big, brow-beating, burly rascal, whom one could well imagine being discharged from the navy for misdemeanour of a very serious character.

Well, as he had taken a leading part in the attack on the *Chung-Tong*, he was not the sort of man to give ground once his villainy had been carried to a successful issue. Of late I had frequently heard him lay down the law to Captain Macshiel, and being the bigger bully he had carried things with a recklessness and a disdain of consequences not likely to engender love. He knew that Macshiel had given himself away, and he had not *finesse* enough to hide that know-

ledge. The result was that Jack soon became as good as his master; and if Mr. Gupp felt inclined to take his ease on the quarter-deck, he accordingly took it. In fact, I was rapidly coming to the conclusion that the real master of the vessel was no less a person than the ex-gunner.

It was therefore with a feeling of uneasiness that I beheld him succumbing to the witcheries of the girl; for I feared the wooing of Mr. Gupp would be attended with ill results. Still I must admit that he seemed to hold a different opinion, for he wooed like one inordinately vain or brutally callous. He seized every opportunity to obtrude his disagreeable presence on the girl, and even went so far as to caution me out of whatever affection I might be secretly nourishing. The man undoubtedly regarded himself as her saviour, which belief had enough of truth in it to make him earnest. If her heart did not exactly melt with gratitude at the thought, his merits must, at least, have softened it.

He was a brute, but a brute with a following at his back, and though my inclination sounded a war-note, my better sense prevailed.

After all, it was just as easy for him to fall in love as it was for me ; and who was I that I should resent his subjection to the gentle passion? Perhaps I thought "gentle passion" not quite the right phrase ; perhaps, also, his presumption irritated me a little.

It all happened on the day after Hayling's formal introduction. I was below at the time, though I heard all about it after. Hayling, who was keeping his watch, saw Gupp come up from below and immediately seat himself beside the girl on one of the seats aft. A few words passed ; but when she tried to rise the gunner held her down. A sharp scuffle followed ; she got clear, and bounded forward. After her he came, and caught her about midships. Then his arms went round her, and despite her struggles he drew her close to him.

Hayling waited no longer than to make sure the girl resented this familiarity. Quick as thought he darted from the bridge, and like the kangaroo of his native land he bounded aft. Before Mr. Gupp realised what was happening, he received a blow on the side of the head which brought him clattering to his knees. Hayling at once took the girl's hand and led

her towards the companion, while she looked up into his hard, rough face, her eyes full of tears.

"Thank you, Mr. Hayling."

He had been called Mr. Hayling often enough before, but never in such a way. The soft little hand nestling into his made his great hand tingle.

"I am sorry for your sake that you should have occasion to thank me."

He stopped at the door and let her pass in. She stole a fearful look forward, and then shuddered.

"That horrid man is coming."

A quick glance was enough for Hayling.

"You may go below without fear. He shall not follow you."

"But you?"

"Oh, I'm all right," said he, with one of his odd laughs.

"You will be careful?"

"I promise you."

He turned and faced the scowling Gupp, who still held his head as though he had a buzzing in his ears. But if he had been drinking before the blow the drunkenness had been knocked out of him. He advanced

stealthily, head down, eyes peering up through bushy brows ; then suddenly, without a word of warning, he drew his sheath-knife and rushed upon the Australian. But Hayling had been taking in every movement, and with a quick spring he caught the man by the wrist and jerked the knife from his grasp. At this moment the captain and I appeared, for we had seen Miss Waltham in the saloon, and she had sobbed out the state of things.

As soon as the knife clattered harmlessly to the deck, Hayling closed with his opponent, and as the men locked their arms around each other a fearful struggle began. Gupp was heavier, and, perhaps, in a rough way, a bit more powerful ; but the Australian had strong arms and quick feet, and a back that seemed to bend and right itself like steel.

They swayed from side to side, now against the deck-house, now against the bulwarks, over which the gunner tried his hardest to force his adversary. But though by a super-human effort he once raised Hayling off his feet, that agile one was down on them again long before the onlooker was aware of it.

And so the fierce struggling and panting went on, until with a quick backward movement Hayling broke from his opponent's hold, and as he did so he sent his fist crashing into Gupp's face.

CHAPTER X

A CAUSE OF ALARM

IT was a wonderfully quick bit of work, and, taking the gunner by surprise, seemed to daze him. He went flying backwards, his huge arms swinging in the air, till the bulwarks brought him up with a crash. As he clattered clumsily to the deck the blood spurted freely from his nose.

I was about to step forward to interfere, when the captain laid his hand on my arm, and with a look cautioned a policy of non-intervention. It was the first inkling I had that all was not well between the captain and his gunner. My hopes leapt freshly. There was undreamt-of possibility in that look.

Hayling here turned and gravely saluted the captain.

“ I’m sorry, sir—— ” he began.

But the old man cut him short.

"Never mind that now. Take care of yourself."

Gupp here arose, presenting a most unpleasant sight. Very formidable he looked, and very vicious. All the bad blood in him being at fever heat, he rushed straight at Hayling, swearing hideously the while. But the second mate, who on occasion could curse a bit himself, was not to be daunted by a furious explosion of expletives, nor cowed by passion, however hideously distorted. He immediately threw himself into position, and as Gupp rushed in at him he suddenly shot out his long left arm, and in a twinkling the gunner was staggering back almost as quickly as he had come. For Hayling's long left had struck him somewhere above the eyes, and for the moment Mr. Gupp could not have been sure if his skull still retained its roof.

When he advanced again it was much more cautiously. An ugly smile played round the lower part of Hayling's mouth. Each showed his love for the other in a truly horrible fashion. They had been longing for such an opportunity—at least, I knew Hayling had—and now it had come.

There was an attempted display of science on the part of Mr. Gupp. He put up his hands in the orthodox fashion and shuffled about, now making a pretence of hitting, and now jumping back; while all the time the Australian watched him with the same awful look—a look which I have called a smile, but which might better be described as a hideous scowl. As Gupp circled round him he duly shifted his feet, but he never advanced or retreated a step. If the gunner ventured too near, Hayling's whole frame seemed to bristle—a sign the worthy Gupp never failed to note or to respect.

Then almost before one seemed to realise what was happening, the two men closed, and a most ferocious bout of punching ensued. Hayling at first strove hard to shake himself free, a proceeding which his opponent strove equally as hard to frustrate. There was no doubt that the safeguard of the one was the danger of the other; for Hayling, who had much the better science, had everything to lose by in-fighting. This Gupp soon realised, and once he had closed with the Australian he took every advantage of his weight and muscle.

The way they slogged each other was something awful to witness, and for the life of me I could not tell who was getting the better of the engagement, until, falling on the deck the men seemed to break of their own accord. Then, with a speed almost incredible in two such big men, they were on their feet again in an instant. Scarcely staying to breathe, they flew at each other, or, rather, it was Hayling who attacked this time, and in such a way as left little doubt of his intention. The shock of the two meeting was extremely painful to witness. The thought of what it must have been like personally to experience makes one shudder. Gupp at once gave way, and Hayling, following him up, beat him so unmercifully that he soon had the big fellow stretched helpless on the deck.

By this time quite a considerable crowd had assembled, and while some began to murmur threateningly at the second mate, others took up the gunner and carried him below.

"It was a fair fight, lads," cried Captain Macshiel, "and the best man won."

This seemed to appease the majority, though some there were who recognised in Gupp a possible leader, and who plainly resented this

treatment of their chief. But Macshiel had spoken, and as yet he was their commander.

Turning round I saw the girl standing by the companion. Her face was horribly white, and she looked so like fainting that I ran across to her.

"I thought you were below."

"I couldn't stay—I couldn't!" she gasped.

"Then you have seen——"

"All;" and her head drooped forward and her lips quivered.

"Well, well, let me take you below now. You look as though you were going to faint."

"But I'm not," she said firmly. "I never fainted in my life. It's horrible, that's all. Tell Mr. Hayling to come here."

I immediately called to him, for he, seeing with whom I was speaking, had begun to sneak forward in a way that did not become such a worthy knight. But my voice cut short his retreat, and, seeing me beckon, he approached awkwardly, as if ashamed of himself, surreptitiously wiping the blood from his face.

A curiously rough and ruffled appearance he presented as he stood before her. He had a contusion over the right eye, which did not add

to his beauty, while the blood had stained the corners of his mouth, the underlip of which was already much swollen. Yet, in spite of it all, there was something about him unmistakably manly and attractive. I wanted to grip his hand, or sling my arm through his. Had I been a woman, I think I would have flung my arms round his neck and had a good cry.

But our Lady of the Sea did nothing of the kind. She held out her little white hand, and she took his big, brown paw, bruised and bloody as it was; and I saw him tremble and look sheepish, and almost drag his hand away.

"Mr. Hayling," she said, and her soft voice was full of the most delightful tenderness, while her sweet eyes glistened with tears, "I am sorry that through me you should have been led into this brawl; but I thank you sincerely for coming to the aid of a defenceless girl."

"I am sorry for your sake that my aid was necessary," he replied; "but it's always yours when you want it."

"Thank you."

But the deep fringe quivered and drooped,

for Hayling was now looking at her in a way that would try a much older woman. Nothing more was said just then, the captain coming up and apologising for the brutal behaviour of his third mate.

While this was going on Hayling stole away, and a few minutes afterwards I joined him in his room, where I found him washing his face and generally attending to his bruises, which, fortunately, were not of a very serious nature. But he did not hide from me the fact that his mind was extremely ill at ease, and that he believed his life would now be doubly insecure. Gupp was sure to seek some method of revenge, and as he was not likely to fancy another personal encounter at fisticuffs, he would assuredly discover some way which produced but a minimum of danger to himself.

Well, there was nothing for it but extreme caution, and I pleaded earnestly on behalf of that most admirable of all qualities. He laughed, and promised all sorts of things; but there was a recklessness about him which betrayed an utter indifference to the way things went—a mood with which I could easily have quarrelled.

I saw no more of him nor of Gupp that day, though I learned that the latter, with the exception of some personal disfigurement, was not much the worse for the encounter. For this I was heartily sorry. A forced stay of a few days on his back might have put him in a more Christian frame of mind. Of Miss Waltham I saw nothing. She, like a wise girl, had kept to her cabin; and very early that night I sought the seclusion of my own. There were too many queer people aboard the *Pulo Way*, too many strange things done, for the dark decks to offer any particular attraction.

I thought the long night would never pass. At every sudden sound I started, and whenever I heard a voice outside in the saloon I waited anxiously for the expected knock at my door. But the morning came at last, and I jumped from my bunk wondering what the new day would bring forth.

I learnt from the steward, who served me with my breakfast, that Miss Waltham had not yet arisen; but to make sure that she was all right I went to her room and knocked. Yes, she was well enough, with the exception of a bad headache. To her knowledge no one

had molested her. She did not think she would get up for an hour or so.

Above deck the day was brilliantly fine, though the heat became intensely oppressive as we drew near the Equator. I lounged about as usual, wishing I had something more conventional to occupy my mind than imaginary attacks from sundry ill-conditioned rovers of the deep. Imagination, and the constant state of alertness to which my invidious position subjected me, were not conducive to that unemotional, if somewhat enervating existence which I had hitherto enjoyed. Some might welcome the change; I didn't.

Prompted by pressing instinct, I then went forward to call on my friend Hayling; but to my repeated assaults upon his door I received no reply. I turned the handle, but the door was locked. Then I went still further forward, hoping he might be about the deck; but the only persons I saw were the mate, who was apparently keeping somebody else's watch, and the man at the wheel.

I waved my hand to Murrell, who looked as ugly and surly as only a man can look who has gone to bed drunk, and who has been somewhat unceremoniously awakened out of his

drunken sleep. He came to the rail of the bridge, and, looking over, leered at me.

"This is a nice mess!" he began.

"What has happened now?"

"Don't you know?"

I was not certain whether the fellow's grin was one of anger or delight.

"I know nothing."

"Then; of course, you haven't heard?"

"Heard what?"

"That the second mate can't be found."

"Can't be found?" I echoed, the words, like my heart, palpitating with anxiety.

"Can't be found anywhere," said the man, with an exasperating smile. "He was called to take his watch as usual. The man at the wheel says the second mate walked up and down for about an hour, and then went below. He did not come back, so we can only suppose that he fell overboard or committed suicide. Anyway, it's beastly rough on me, and I only wish the brute had been more considerate."

I turned away with the sickest feeling upon me that I had ever experienced. In this I seemed to see the beginning of the end, and in my impotence I did nothing but curse the *Pulo Way* and all her abominable crew. That

Hayling had either fallen overboard or committed suicide was a belief I did not entertain for a moment. I knew it could not be. He was not stupid enough for the one, nor cowardly enough for the other. That he had gone might be true; but if so, some one had kindly given him a helping hand.

The rest of that morning I hung about the deck a prey to some distressing emotions. That Hayling had been done away with I did not doubt, and I wondered when my turn would come. That I was as little liked as he I knew, that fact tormenting me with the paralyzing knowledge that in the end my vigilance would serve me to no purpose. It was not a thought of which I was deeply enamoured, though it clung to me like a love-sick woman who will not be denied.

Miss Waltham did not appear on deck until well on in the afternoon, and then to my chagrin I found that Macshiel was her attendant cavalier. Several turns they took up and down together, I watching them eagerly; for I had begun to think some strange things concerning the captain. But as soon as the girl made for the bench aft and seated herself, I went round to them and began to chat away

as though oblivious of the fact that Captain Macshiel twisted his scraggy neck-whiskers with an exaggerated motion.

"By the way, captain," said I, "this is awful news about the second mate."

The old man scowled; but the girl started forward, an anxious look in her face.

"The second mate—that is Mr. Hayling?"

"Yes."

"What has become of him?" She grew perceptibly whiter as she put the question.

"Have you not heard?"

"Nothing."

I looked at the captain, and a curious shade played up and down his cadaverous jaws; but whether it was annoyance at my blundering, or a certain indefinable shamefacedness, I could not say.

"Very sad," said he, in his most unctuous manner—"very sad indeed, and singularly unaccountable."

"What is very sad?" asked the girl.

"This about the second mate—he's missing."

"Missing?" she echoed, the scare passing as plainly over her face as a cloud crossing the sun.

"Yes. He can't be found anywhere. We are wondering whether he fell overboard or committed suicide."

"Oh, no, no!" cried the girl. "He could not."

"I admit," said Macshiel, with a queer smile, "that I would not have thought him capable of one or the other; but how else are we to account for his disappearance?"

"Have you asked Mr. Gupp?" I ventured.

He turned on me suddenly. A nasty glitter leapt from his sunken eyes.

"Do you know," said he, "I rather fancy you think we are not possessed of a single redeeming virtue, as though from one act you could deduce a man's character. Mr. Gupp has lately suffered too much at the hands of the second mate to care about confronting him again. I myself have questioned Gupp very carefully, and I don't believe the poor beggar has left his bed since the fight. I admit the sadness of it," he continued affectedly, "and also, from my point of view, the inconvenience. As it is, we have none too many efficient officers on board."

From such a generous tribute we could not dissent. Captain Macshiel may have been

privy to the mystery, or he may not have been; though from the nature of the man it was always difficult to tell the real feelings which animated him. The girl, whose eyes were full of anxiety, shook her head and gazed wistfully out across the sea; while for want of something better to do I filled my pipe and otherwise trifled with the subject. Yet no sooner had Captain Macshiel left us than the girl's eyes sought mine with a truth-compelling look.

"I don't for one moment believe that Hayling either fell overboard or committed suicide," I said, replying to that look. "He was not stupid enough for the one, and there was no immediate reason for the other. Besides, he was not the man to shuffle out of a trouble."

"I don't believe he was," she replied. "And yet—if not——"

"He has many enemies on board, and one in particular. If he were surprised, the rest could easily be done."

"The rest?" she gasped.

"I fear we can only put one construction on his disappearance. Poor Hayling must be quite a hundred miles astern by this."

She did not answer ; but as I looked into her face I saw it grow white as death. Fearing to speak, I turned about and fumbled for a match, and just then I beheld the sea through a strange mist.

“ Poor fellow ! ” she said, “ I wonder whose turn it will be next ? ”

I hadn't much doubt myself ; but seeing her so distressed I tried to make the best of matters. It would be time enough to weep when the blow descended.

Then we walked slowly up and down between the main hatch and the wheel-house, and gradually her maidenly reserve thawed, and she spoke in a way of the big Australian which convinced me of the impression he had made upon her. Not that she actually said as much, or wished to imply as much ; but the admiration of the woman for the strong man was so apparent that I would have been exceedingly dense had I failed to perceive the drift of her inclinations.

CHAPTER XI

THE USES OF TELEGRAPHY

I ESCORTED her to the companion-way, when she expressed the wish to go below, and though for hours after I hung about the deck, I saw her no more that day. The ship still plodded on her southerly course, the slow, rhythmic beat of the engines being the only companionship I had—that and my thoughts. The latter I could very well have done without, but they had no intention of forsaking me. Fortunately, as far as my person was concerned, I remained unmolested, but I lived in a horrid state of expectancy. Indeed, at times I almost wished that something would happen, so that my mind might be relieved of its fearful tension, but, as if to thwart me even in this, I was left severely alone. Perhaps my fellow-voyagers reckoned the doing away

of Hayling quite enough excitement for the present.

That night passed as uneventfully as the others, and I awoke with a new feeling of security. True, I had not forgotten Hayling's fate; but the conviction that I was to live was forcing itself upon me—for no reason, as far as I could see, but an absurd optimism. Perhaps I judged my companions by the light of my own spirit.

Surely they had shed enough blood: there was enough sin on their souls? Somehow, one did not quite associate souls with Murrell or Gupp; but not having quite forgotten my early training, I was bound to believe those two bad men were the possessors of equally bad souls. As for the Chinamen, the intellect fails utterly to conceive such a curiosity as a Chinaman's soul.

On deck there was the same awful loneliness of which I have so often remarked, and which was rapidly becoming a part of me, or I of it. The smoke was stealing up through the funnel in a thin, transparent haze; the screw ground its way through the water astern. Now and again a smooth wave broke and fell back from us with a low, monotonous roar.

I was glad when our sweet Lady of the Sea stepped out of the companion and came towards me. It was odd, but at the sight of her there was no more loneliness. And if her face was just a trifle pale, wasn't it as sweet a face as a man could wish to look on?

To my inquiry as to the state of her health she smiled rather wearily, I thought, and explained that she had not enjoyed a very good night, as her rest had been disturbed by the pertinacity of sundry ill-mannered rats.

"Rats!" I echoed; for with all her faults the *Pulo Way* was as free of those vermin as one would expect to find the best-regulated ship.

"Yes, rats," said she; "and I never heard such a villainously systematic knocking and scraping in all my life."

"That's unfortunate," said I, smiling gravely, for she was much in earnest. "I will speak to the captain, and see if he can do anything for you. Your cabin must be over the store-room."

"Then why don't the creatures eat the stores and leave my floor alone?"

"I don't think they can possibly eat your

floor, because between it and them there is an iron deck."

"But may they not get between the iron deck and the floor? If they were to come through, Mr. Ravensford, I believe I should die of fright."

"If you will allow me I will examine the floor when you go below."

I could not help smiling as I thought of any one on the *Pulo Way* being frightened of a rat. But I knew how women detest all such vermin; and as she descanted on the extraordinary behaviour of these particular rodents, I listened with all the gravity such a recital warranted. And truly, if her terror had not lent wings to her imagination, those rats had certain powers which proved them to be no ordinary vermin. Indeed, she went so far as to declare that they actually signalled to each other in a horribly human manner, the result of which caused her some quaking moments during the long watches of the night.

Then from rats we began to talk about our prospects, and the disappearance of Hayling. Of course, I told her that I had no further information to impart; at the same time I thought it would have been a cruel kindness

to let her hope. Hayling had assuredly gone to that place which every good sailor most cordially loathes—the bottom of the sea. From the romantic point of view it may be an appropriate place for him; but be sure the romance of the thing never appeals to his imagination.

I hope I am not sentimental—at least, not sentimental in its worst sense; but I would give much to know that some one will speak as kindly of me as she did of the dead and gone Hayling. It may be a weakness of mine, and perhaps I ought to be ashamed of it; but candidly I am not, and what is more, I don't think much of a man who hasn't a weakness of some sort.

When at last she intimated her intention of going below, I rose and accompanied her, wishing at once to make my promised investigation. But though I searched every corner of the floor assiduously, I could discover no hole which would give ingress to a rat.

She watched me with a comical expression of nervousness, and after I had duly examined the four corners, informed me that the knocking did not come from the corners at all, but from the middle of the floor. I smiled in-

wardly as I proceeded to examine that particular portion of the cabin, for I knew now that her imagination had been tricking her. Still, to gratify her, I pulled up the strip of carpet that ran down the middle of the floor, and discovered—nothing.

I looked at her and smiled, and she smiled back in a serious sort of way, which showed that she was not yet convinced. So down on my knees I went, and carefully examined each seam, even going so far as to rap loudly with my knuckles. Nor did I content myself with this, for I went all over the floor, kicking with the heel of my boot, listening intently for the expected hollow sound. But nothing coming of it, I rose without speaking, and smiled faintly, not wishing to hurt her feelings.

And still I saw that she was not satisfied, for she kept repeating, "Strange," "I assure you I was not dreaming;" and then, "Strange" again, and "Most unaccountable." I inquired if she still wished to move, and if I should ask the captain; but she blushed a little, and said that, though she liked to know the meaning of a thing, she was not quite the coward I seemed to imagine her. Now, as I would have spurned such a detestable thought,

I made haste to let her know how much she had misjudged me, and several very conciliatory speeches I had to utter to assure her of my sincerity.

I left her with a vague, incredulous smile on her face, and having passed through the saloon, was just about to mount the companion way, when I heard some one cry "Hist!" Turning round I saw the girl standing at her cabin door, a singular look of wonder and alarm on her face. As her eyes met mine she beckoned to me.

Instantly I was by her side, when, without speaking, she turned and pointed at the cabin floor. Guessing in a moment what had happened, I stooped low over the carpet, when I distinctly heard a soft rat-tat beneath.

I looked at her and saw the triumph in her eyes. Then, whipping off the carpet, I laid my ear to the boards, and sure enough a great rapping and scraping was going on below.

"You are right," said I. "The rats have certainly got in between the two decks."

"Now you can understand my terror?"

"Perfectly."

Just then, if anything, the noise grew

louder, though it no longer resembled the scratching or gnawing of rats, but had resolved itself into a succession of sharp knocks. At first, I confess, I was fairly startled ; for the knocking appeared extremely systematic, and came at regular intervals. Certainly no mundane rat had ever achieved such a remarkable triumph, and for the moment I thought that either I or the girl was an unconscious medium, and that the rapping emanated from some disembodied spirit. But being ignorant of spiritualism, and consequently a disbeliever, I immediately connected the rapping with the engines ; for in any other way such a regular beating was certainly unaccountable.

Then, hardly knowing why, I rapped loudly in answer, and after waiting a moment or two up came the regular beat, beat as before. When it stopped I rapped again, and to my surprise—I might almost say to my horror—up came a succession of precisely similar sounds.

It was curious, but the knocking was reminiscent—painfully reminiscent. Blurred visions of days gone by came crowding upon me, and with a cry I bounded to my feet. What I had heard was nothing more nor less than

I puzzled awhile to remember my alphabet, and then I slowly rapped out the question, "Who are you?"

I put my ear low down to the floor and waited anxiously, though the blood surged to my brain, and every pulse of my body was athrob.

Slowly came the reply in somewhat uncertain rappings:

. — — . — — . — . . . — . — — .

This being translated gave the word "Hayling."

I sprang to my feet, and in my excitement seized Miss Waltham somewhat roughly by the wrists.

"He's alive!" I cried. "He's alive!"

Her face was full of wonder, her eyes burning with excitement; but she managed to gasp out, "Who is alive?"

"Hayling!"

"Hayling! How do you know?"

"He has just sent me a telegram."

The wonder deepened in her great eyes, but she said nothing; though I believe she thought for the moment that I had gone mad.

I quickly explained the apparently unexplainable, telling her how Hayling and I had once discussed this very science of telegraphy. Then dropping on my knees again, he and I carried on the following conversation in a more or less imperfect manner :—

Ravensford : " Are you well ? "

Hayling : " Starving. "

Ravensford : " Who did it ? "

Hayling : " Gupp and the mate. "

Ravensford : " Does the captain know ? "

Hayling : " Yes. "

Ravensford : " Whereabouts are you ? "

Hayling : " I cannot see ; but I imagine somewhere near the bulkhead of the store-room. "

Ravensford : " How can we best help you ? "

Hayling : " By breaking into the store-room and forcing the bulkhead. "

Ravensford : " Courage. We will do our best. "

Hayling : " All right. "

After all, words are but a poor medium for the transcription of human emotions, though some people use them marvellously well. How ill these few bald phrases represent the in-

tensity of feeling or imagination which was mine, the maddening anxiety which was hers, or the hope which was his !

I was conscious that the girl was standing well within the cabin ; but until I turned round to look at her I was totally unaware of the presence of Captain Macshiel. Yet there he stood lounging in the doorway, an amused and curious smile on his dry, quizzing face. I rose hastily, forgetful of the fact that I had been caught napping. The smile deepened round his eyes.

" Well," said he, " what are you doing there ? Saying your prayers ? "

" No ; listening to the rats."

" Rats, eh ? Do you think they understand the signal ? "

" I think so."

" Much good may it do them."

" They are intelligent rats," I said.

He smiled. " But powerless." Then, turning to the girl, he said, " I am sorry that you should be disturbed in this manner. I must see if I cannot get you another room."

" You are very good, Captain Macshiel."

His eyebrows came down with a jerk ; he started as though he had been stung. Then

an ugly, suspicious look swept suddenly into his face. I sometimes thought the man was not wholly bad, though he was bad enough to resent any imputation of goodness. What had he done for her that she should call him good? And yet I knew he would liked to have hugged the delusion that she believed in him, only, having some sense of the fitness of things, he dared not. Therefore, his brows beetled, and his parrot beak took unto itself an ugly curve. The knowledge of what he was made him angry with what he could not be.

Just then, as if further to increase the awkwardness of the situation, the rapping below recommenced. The captain looked at me, and a cold, shivery sort of smile played round his hollow eyes.

"Most remarkable rats," he said. "Upon my soul, I must let the cat loose in the store-room."

I followed him out into the saloon, giving the girl a reassuring squeeze of the hand as I went. He stopped when he saw me, and looked me up and down in a quizzing, impertinent way.

"Captain!"

“ Well ? ”

“ May I have a word or two with you ? ”

“ A dozen if you like. Come this way.”

He led me into his room, which was on the other side of the saloon, and pointing to a settee, bade me be seated. He himself lounged against his bunk, stuck his hands in his pockets, and surveyed me with an easy, insolent smile.

“ Of course you know the meaning of that knocking ? ” I began.

“ Of course. As I said, I will not have Miss Waltham disturbed. The cat shall be sent below.”

“ But why not give the rat a chance to come out ? ”

“ Because a rat is a most ungrateful bit of vermin, and has absolutely no conscience.”

“ Tell me, Captain Macshiel,” said I, “ what has Hayling done that you should allow him to be treated in this fashion ? ”

“ Hayling ! ” he echoed, simulating wonder. “ Why, he fell overboard two days ago ! ”

“ You know very well that he did nothing of the kind.”

“ Look here,” said he, a deep scowl knotting his ugly eyebrows, “ you have a decidedly

aggressive way about you—a way I don't like. Why the deuce can't you mind your own business, and not pit yourself against me on every possible occasion? "

"I hope I am not such a fool as to pit myself against you," said I. "The unfortunate thing is that our interests always seem to clash."

"You are indeed a fool if you let your interests clash with mine. You must know who is master, and that what the master wishes is law."

"That is just it," I answered, with a meaning drawl. "Who *is* the master? "

At this his eyes burned keenly, and he rubbed his neck-whiskers sharply—a habit of his which was anything but pleasant to watch. In some vague way it seemed to remind me of the noose and the white cap.

"You ought to have known by this time that there is only one master aboard this vessel."

"Then why did Gupp and the mate take it upon themselves to put Hayling away? "

"Look here," he said, anger and curiosity streaking his face with ominous lines: "I am the man to ask questions. Hayling was

put away for a good cause, and there he'll stay."

I could see he knew what was passing in my mind, and no man who has once been in authority likes to feel that authority slipping from him. Rather than I should think such a thing, he was even willing to apologise for the insubordinate Gupp.

"But what has he done that you should put him below and starve him?"

"Who told you that yarn?"

"He did."

He laughed incredulously.

"Rot! But understand, this is my affair."

"And mine."

He laughed harshly.

"Yours! What has it to do with you?"

"Everything."

His grin became more unpleasant.

"Oh, very well. There's the key of the store-room." And he pointed to a short brass key that hung on a hook above his bunk. "He's down there somewhere; go and force your way through the bulkhead and let him out."

"I intend to."

"I would if I were you," he sneered.

"You look just the man who could do it."

It did not need this taunt to further my purpose. I had not entered into this argument with him without due consideration. Living, as I did, from day to day—almost from hour to hour—in an exasperating state of nervous uncertainty, I knew that I had nothing to gain from him and everything to lose. The security of four o'clock might change to imprisonment at five; and the sea was such a handy place to tip a fellow into. Therefore my mind was made up, and though I failed to win him over to my side, I meant to go straight on.

"I am just the man who is going to try," I replied, in an excellent manner of coolness. "I must have that key, Captain Macshiel."

"Certainly," he grinned. "Anything else at the same time?"

"Simply that I wish you to remain quiet while I effect my friend's release."

"Oh, very well," said he, turning to open one of the short drawers of his locker. "Anything to oblige you. Wouldn't you like some of the men to lend a hand?"

Now, it may be taken for granted that I,

knowing my man, had watched him closely, so that when I saw him turn to the locker I instinctively guessed for what reason. Therefore I laid my hand on his arm.

“ I cannot allow you to open that locker, Captain Macshiel.”

“ By God ! ” he sputtered, and almost before I was aware of it he flew at me. His thin, sinewy fingers curled themselves round my throat, and had I not flung myself back with an extraordinary jerk, fetching him meanwhile a smashing blow in the face, I verily believe he would have choked me. As it was I freed my neck of his clutch, and met his rush with some degree of judgment.

The tussle that followed was extremely sharp while it lasted, the fortunes of either varying with every moment ; but as we fell together his head came in contact with the sharp point of the curved arm of the settee, and he rolled over on his face with a low moan.

A hasty examination showed me that though he bled somewhat profusely he was only stunned ; so I lifted him on to his bunk, took down the key of the store-room, went out, and locked him in.

CHAPTER XII

VARIOUS PREPARATIONS

UPON stepping out into the saloon I encountered the white, anxious face of the girl.

"Thank Heaven!" she gasped. "I heard you quarrelling, and I feared."

"He is safe enough for the present," said I, jerking my head backward.

"You have not killed him?"

"Not yet."

She clung trembling to the back of the bench, and my heart smote me when I saw the terror in her eyes.

"I am sorry for you, Miss Waltham, but nothing but a brave spirit can aid us now."

I could do no less than give encouragement, though I felt badly in need of a little of it myself.

"I will try," she said. "But shall we always lead this awful life?"

"Indeed, I hope not; but for the present we are here, and as yet I see no sign of our release."

By this time I had made my way to the after end of the saloon, where, through a trap-door, was the entrance to the store-room. This door was secured by a padlock, the whole being covered by a narrow strip of red carpet. The carpet I had up in a twinkling; the key was inserted in the lock, which sprang back with a solid click. To lift the trap-door was now the work of a moment.

An extremely dark aperture yawned beneath me, which necessitated the calling into requisition of my cabin lamp. Bringing it back, I lit it, and then as I stood upon the ladder I looked up at the girl.

"Do you join us in this, Miss Waltham?"

"Join you?" she echoed.

"I mean that you are perfectly safe, and that you need not identify yourself with Hayling or with me. But if you do, and the captain gets to know of it, he may treat you as an enemy."

"I would rather he did," she said boldly,

"than that Mr. Hayling—or you," she added, as an afterthought, "should think me so contemptible."

"Believe me, neither he nor I would do that. It is a matter of your safety first, that is all."

"I have decided, Mr. Ravensford, for I see the folly of abject submission. Go and rescue your friend. I will keep guard, and if those horrid men appear I will let you know."

I think she must have seen something more than pleasure in my eyes, for she turned her face aside and pretended to listen. Half angry with myself, I slipped down the stairs, and the door almost immediately closed upon me.

What was by courtesy called the store-room seemed to be a portion of the after-hold which had been partitioned off. It was a room of considerable space, and thoroughly well stocked with cases and bags of every description. In a partly open box on one side I saw a substantial crowbar, the obvious use of which was instantly apparent. This I laid carefully on one side, foreseeing an immediate use for it. Then hastily I began to remove the bags and packing-cases from the forward bulkhead against which they were stacked,

and behind which lay the unfortunate Hayling.

There were tins of biscuits, cases of liquor, bags of flour, rows of preserves, and Heaven only knows what not ; but gradually I slipped them aside until I had cleared a narrow passage up to the bulkhead. Against this I knocked rather eagerly, and in the short interval that followed I harboured many distressing thoughts ; but presently my signal was answered, and I at once retreated for the afore-mentioned crowbar, it being the very instrument for the occasion.

As I came to the foot of the stairs I beheld the girl peeping down.

“ We shall soon have him out now,” said I.

“ That’s good.”

“ No one stirring ? ”

“ No one. But it’s awfully lonely up here.”

“ Would you like to come down ? ”

“ Oh, may I ? ” There was no doubt about the wish.

“ If you would rather.”

Without more ado she slipped through the aperture, descended the ladder, and stood trembling beside me. Then I sprang up the ladder and closed the trap-door after me. We

were in for it now, and trapped nicely if discovered; but the exigencies of the situation allowed no other mode of procedure. Caught or not, there would be some satisfaction in knowing that we were altogether.

Therefore, without more ado, I seized the crowbar and vigorously attacked the bulkhead, which soon began to yield to my exertions. Bit by bit I worked my way in between the beams, and soon as I was enabled to get a fair purchase the cracking of timbers told of the excellent headway I was making. It was not a difficult task, though the bulkhead was built with some nicety, and soon I had the satisfaction of being able to speak to Hayling through the aperture. Renewed assiduity resulted, and in a little while the aperture had grown wide enough to admit of the passage of a body. Then Hayling, in a weak voice, called me to him. I immediately crawled through, while the girl came to the aperture and held the lamp.

The poor fellow was so weak that I had the greatest difficulty in getting him into the store-room; but once there I soon broached the wine and gave him a few mouthfuls of claret. Then little by little I fed him with

biscuit soaked in wine ; and to show that hunger was the chief cause of his weakness, he presently said, with a smile—

“ Old chap, I’m starving.”

Of the biscuits and potted meat he ate I fear to mention, having no wish to be classed with the unveracious historian ; but he ate so voraciously that I began to feel nervous.

“ Never a bite all this time,” said he, “ but a few dried peas, which I discovered by accident in the hold.”

“ And how do you feel now ? ”

“ A new man. But I want a little daylight and fresh air. Let us get out of this.”

He clambered rather unsteadily to his feet, and then carefully stretched himself.

“ I believe I’m whole,” said he, “ though most infernally sore. You don’t miss anything ? ”

“ No.”

“ That’s right. But let us get up above. I’m sick of the darkness and the rats.”

Then as he turned from me he saw the girl standing in the distance, and he peered forward in a peculiar, uncertain manner. Then he put out his hand and felt for me.

“ Of course I’m not dreaming, old chap ?

But I have been seeing something like this all through my dreary confinement. That is our Lady of the Sea?"

"Our other comrade."

He staggered across to her and held out his hand.

"You must pardon me, Miss Waltham. I did not dream you were here."

"I am glad to see you alive, Mr. Hayling. They told us you had fallen overboard."

"I nearly fell overboard — with a little friendly aid," he added, in his dry way; "but such an end would have been too sudden and too pleasant for me. There were other hopes. But pardon me; my lungs are positively shrieking for fresh air."

So, first of all, up I went, and opened the trap-door, Miss Waltham immediately following me. Then I descended again, and this time sent Hayling up before me, keeping close to him lest he fell. But he was regaining his strength with almost every breath he drew, and he seemed to mount the ladder with as much firmness as I.

Once in the saloon, I managed for the first time to get a good look at him, and a truly woful sight he presented. His face, where it

was not thickly coated with dirt, was almost ghastly in its pallor; his clothes were torn and defaced almost beyond recognition, while his hands were bruised and bloody. Indeed, both wrists, which looked black and swollen, were still encircled by the rings of the handcuffs with which he had been secured, the chain itself having been broken.

He saw me looking at him, and an ugly smile played round his eyes.

“Yes, they were very careful of me; but I managed to smash the chain against an old stanchion. Not without some trouble, as you may see.”

He held up his hands, which, swollen, cut, and dirty as they were, looked positively hideous. With a hard laugh, he dangled the bit of chain in the air. The girl, turning away, hid her face in her hands.

But all this naturally took up a good deal of time, and as it seemed to me that every moment was of importance, I, with as few words as possible, gave him a brief account of what had happened during his absence. As I spoke the vacancy and indifference gradually faded from his eyes; a more resolute and rational look crept there, and I saw that he

comprehended the true awkwardness of our position.

"Well," said he, fixing me with a keen look, "what's to be done now?"

"My dear Hayling, that's just what I want to know."

"Um!"

He was silent for a while. Then he said—

"Of course you can guess what you have to expect from our friends?"

"I think so."

"I know what I have to expect. They would listen to nothing but an unconditional surrender. That's out of the question?"

"Quite."

"Well, then, we had better get hold of what arms we can and entrench ourselves in the store-room. We shall have plenty to eat and drink, and hold a practically unassailable position. Moreover, we shall be able to starve Macshiel into submission inside of two days."

I didn't half like the thought of being cooped up in the dark, though I instantly saw the advantage of a varied and practically unlimited commissariat. I was not by nature a fighting-man, though I fancied that if I had to fight I should like to do it in the open.

Then there was the vital question of arms. I had but the one revolver, with a small box of cartridges; Hayling had nothing.

“Well,” said he, “we must see what the old man has got.”

With that he strode towards the captain’s room, unlocked the door, and passed in, I after him.

Macshiel still lay upon the bed in, it seemed, the same position I had thrown him. At first I felt a little anxious; but a closer inspection showed that he was breathing soundly and regularly, like a man in deep sleep. In the rack above his bunk was a rifle, which Hayling immediately took down.

“A Winchester magazine,” said he. “I hope it’s loaded.”

Not alone was the hope fulfilled, but the magazine itself was full, and contained some eight or ten cartridges. Hayling showed his teeth as he grinned, and by the way he handled the weapon I knew he had been accustomed to firearms.

I, in the meantime, opened the drawer to which the captain had moved when I ordered him to desist—an order which brought about our scuffle and Hayling’s release. I congratu-

lated myself as I thought of the accuracy of my judgment, for almost the first thing I beheld was a revolver. This I seized and examined, and finding it loaded, handed it to the second mate.

"Capital," said he. "Just look round for some ammunition while I tidy up a bit;" and while I searched the drawers of the locker, he hurriedly washed himself in the captain's basin.

My search resulted in the discovery of another box of cartridges for the revolver and about half a dozen stray ones for the rifle. These I handed over to Hayling, who, now that his face was washed, looked a wee bit more presentable; though the scrubby black beard that was sprouting thickly all over his cheeks did not improve his beauty. He clutched the cartridges eagerly, as though the lumps of lead were so many lumps of gold, and with an ill-concealed sigh of satisfaction he dropped them into his pocket. His face, as I have said, was very pale, but there was a look in his eyes that heightened his paleness and made him almost repulsive. He was much indebted to some one aboard the *Pulo Way*, and by the look of hellish resolution in his face I knew he meant to pay in full.

He leant over the unconscious captain and shook him roughly, and when the old man opened his bewildered eyes Hayling thrust his swollen wrists into the skipper's face.

"Where's the key of these irons?" he said. "Quick!" And with a rough jerk he pulled Macshiel into a sitting posture.

For the space of a few seconds the captain appeared a little dazed, but as soon as he recognised the second mate he guessed what had happened. Then he pointed to a canvas hold-all that hung above the washstand, in one of the pockets of which I found a bunch of keys. One of them fitting Hayling's handcuffs, he was soon released. Next he slipped the same bracelets on the captain's wrists, and lashed them tightly together with the wire which held the curtain that ran along the bunk. Then he flung the keys through the port.

The captain was so dazed, or so filled with wonder, that he offered no resistance whatever; and not until he was made absolutely secure did he seem to realise what it meant. Then he began to sputter and threaten.

"Look here," said Hayling, laying his hand on the skipper's chest, an action which forced

the worthy Macshiel on to the broad of his back, "if I did the right thing by you, I should take you up and drop you over the side, and the world would be well rid of a damned blackguard ; but though I may have the wish, I have not the intention to rob the hangman, and so, unless you interfere with me again, you are safe as far as I am concerned."

The captain bit his lips with vexation.

"This is the gratitude I get for saving you!" he whined. "Gupp and the mate would have thrown you overboard."

"You preferred that I should be ironed and thrown into the hold to die of hunger. But, damn you, I broke your irons, and with infinite labour worked my way aft ; and here I am, and God in heaven only knows why I don't put a bullet through you."

So furious was he that I really thought he would, and I am sure, by the way Macshiel whitened and shrivelled up, that he believed so too. I placed my hand lightly on Hayling's arm, and he turned and smiled at me ; but even then it might be hard to say what would have happened had he not caught a glimpse of the girl standing in the doorway.

Something like a flush of shame sprang to his face, and without more ado he seized the rifle and withdrew, I following and locking the door after me.

"Well, Ravensford," said he, "it's open war now. I am a certainty; but you——"

"I am with you, Hayling."

His eyes danced as he cried laconically, "Good!" Then, turning to the girl, who stood on one side, trembling and expectant, he became as grave and earnest as any reverend seignior.

"You know just how we stand, Miss Waltham?"

"Yes," she said, "and if you will let me, I will stand with you."

"But we two—against the ship? The captain has no quarrel with you. He will protect you."

"For what?"

This was too much for Hayling, so he didn't attempt to answer it.

"If you will trust me as a brother," he said, "I will do all a brother could for a sister."

"And I."

She held out one hand to Hayling and

another to me, and as she gave us each a generous pressure she said, "I would like to have two such brothers."

Well, whatever Hayling thought I wouldn't like to say, but I know I felt capable of performing prodigies of valour, and so eager to begin that I suggested that we should at once proceed to put our house in order. But Hayling did not answer, seeming to be plunged deeply in thought. Then he said, "I don't seem to fancy the store-room, though I admit its strategic advantages."

I never had fancied it, and so I told him.

"If we have to fight," he continued, "we may as well see what we're doing; so I suggest that we fortify this saloon, and keep the captain as a hostage."

"Or take possession of the wheel-house aft. Then we shall be able to see everything that's going on."

"The very place!" cried he. "They will only be able to attack us from the front. A brilliant idea, old man. Down with you and pass up the provisions."

Down the ladder I scrambled into the store-room, where the lamp still burnt dimly, and soon I had passed up enough provisions to

keep a dozen men for a fortnight. Nor did I forget a couple of cases of claret that stood temptingly near. Then, when Hayling cried "Enough," I came up from below, and together we carried the stuff up the companion-way, our new sister lending a willing hand.

Once all the provisions were safely piled at the head of the companion, I stepped out to reconnoitre, and finding the deck clear, we succeeded in conveying all the stores into the wheel-house aft without attracting the attention of the officer on watch. Then we began thoroughly to overhaul the place, which, besides a few nautical odds and ends, such as a coil of rope, some rusty tools in an old locker, a piece of sail-cloth, a disused binnacle, a few extra oars, a short spar or two, held nothing of any consequence, or of any value to us.

The house itself was rather a formidable structure, forming a sort of short poop, up which a ladder led on either side. Beneath each of these ladders was a door, while between the doors were two fairly large windows. These in turn were fitted with heavy teak shutters, which slid in grooves, so that one could cover or uncover the glass at will.

These were pulled almost over, the doors fastened, and the provisions nicely arranged in one of the far corners. A fairly comfortable lounge was made for our companion, where the possibility of her being hit was reduced to a minimum. Then Hayling asked for permission to light his pipe, and we sat down calmly to try to contemplate the situation. Indeed, I was just beginning to congratulate myself on the success of our move and the efficacy of our defence, when Hayling sprang to his feet with a cry of alarm.

"By Jove, Ravensford, we have forgotten the cannon!"

Heavens! so we had. In arranging our defence we had thought only of the rush of the crew and the pattering of ordinary bullets—that is, supposing we really suffered a siege, which was not absolutely certain. Indeed, I harboured the belief that we would be left severely alone once our resources were thoroughly appreciated. In an ordinary way it would have been no easy thing to dislodge from our position a couple of determined men; but now with Gupp and his infernal cannon we and everything about us would be blown to pieces in ten minutes.

I looked at Hayling and he looked at me ; the girl over in the far corner said nothing. Neither he nor I had the courage to turn to her.

“ Well, old chap,” said he, “ it must be done.”

I nodded. Then, with a smile, he turned to the girl, but at the sight of her white, troubled face the smile vanished.

“ Ravensford and I have got a little business forward,” said he. “ Would you be afraid to stay here until we return ? ”

“ No,” she said, “ not in the least.”

But in spite of her brave words there was a curious little quiver in her voice.

“ That’s capital,” he replied approvingly. “ Lock the door when we are gone, and don’t open it until you see us returning.”

Then he held out his hand and drew her aside.

“ Courage, sister ! ” I heard him say.

We slipped out, and making use of the deck-house as a cover, rapidly passed forward.

CHAPTER XIII

WAR CLOUDS

HAYLING, who carried a hammer, a chisel, and a wrench in his hand, whispered as he drew me in beside the engine-room skylight—

“You must rush up on the bridge and cover the mate, or whoever it is. I will swarm up the fo’c’sle and attend to the gun.”

I nodded, and then slipped stealthily round one side of the skylight, while he disappeared round the other. From there to the bridge could not have been more than twenty paces, and this distance I covered quickly and without interruption. Once my hand touched the rail of the steps which led up to the bridge, I stole a sharp glance round. Seeing no one, I crept quickly but silently up the steps. The

mate was standing just before the binnacle, his back to me, and I saw him start forward and lean over the rail. Then he roared out, "Hi, you there ! What do you want forrad ? "

The person to whom he shouted was, of course, Hayling, who had already mounted the fo'c'sle steps, and was busy slashing the lines which secured the canvas that covered the gun.

"That's his affair," I said; and at the same time I levelled my pistol at the mate's face. "Keep your hands out of your pockets if you don't want me to shoot."

He turned sharply at the sound of my voice, an oath on his lips; but when he saw the pistol pointing somewhere between his nose and chin, he blanched horribly, and a look of fear and rage fought openly upon his massive countenance.

"This is nice sort of work!" he whined. "You seem to be taking a bit on yourself, eh ? "

"It's about time, considering the company we keep."

"Oh, you're too particular," he replied, perpetrating a ghastly attempt at a pleasant smile. "If it wasn't for you and that chap

forrad we should be the happiest ship's company afloat."

"That matter is open to doubt. However, we quite recognise the singularity of our present position; and if you don't drop your hand at once, I'll——" and my finger instinctively closed round the trigger.

Down went his hand from his breast, and a hideous scowl seemed to flatten his flabby face. Then he favoured me with another of his hideous grins, and tried a little elephantine banter; but, without answering, I kept one eye on him and another on the man at the wheel. In all other respects fortune favoured us, for there was no one else about the decks.

Meanwhile, from an occasional glance forward, I could see that Hayling was busy at work with his hammer and his wrench upon the breech of the gun. The mate watched him with an indifference which was quite commendable, though I doubt if he felt really as apathetic as he wished to appear. Once he asked me contemptuously what the fool was doing forward, but as I replied, "A little private business which especially concerns him," he tossed his big head disdainfully,

and somewhat childishly began to hum a tune.

But though the little time that Hayling really remained forward seemed everlasting, it at length came to an end. Presently he lifted up his hands, and I saw that he held the breech-lock of the cannon between them. This he poised somewhat triumphantly above his head; then walked deliberately to the side and flung it over. Showing no sign of haste or flurry, he leisurely descended the forecastle steps and came towards the bridge. Before he passed under it he looked up at me and smiled.

"I've settled that bit of business," he said. "You can come down now. Well, Murrell, rather surprised to see me, eh?"

This I heard as I descended to the deck.

"Oh, no," said the mate. "It was our intention to let you out after we had punished you a little more."

"Murrell, you're a liar!"

"Oh, very well," answered Murrell, in an aggrieved voice; "call me what you like, but it won't alter facts a bit."

"No," said Hayling; "and we have an account to settle."

The mate mumbled something, and then turned away, while Hayling sprang beneath the bridge and joined me. At the same moment the steam whistle began to blow, and was kept going in a way that we rightly guessed was meant for an alarm. Hayling stood still, and then looked up at the bridge, a dark scowl crossing his face. For the moment I thought he intended to rush up and without further delay settle his account with the mate; but the sudden appearance of two or three of the men forward made him change his mind. He turned round, and pointing aft, dashed back, I close behind him.

The girl was waiting for us. Indeed, the sudden sound of the fog-horn had filled her with nervous apprehension—an apprehension which increased tenfold as she beheld us rushing towards her; but it affected her energies in no way, for as we approached the door swung open, and we darted within.

Naturally our first task was to see that our weapons were ready, the ammunition handy. This done, I explained the blowing of the whistle, what Hayling had accomplished, and how. And all the time I spoke the big fellow sat at the window smoking and watching, the

rifle close beside him, ready for any emergency. Now and again he turned and smiled reassuringly at her, and then it was I thought that there never was such a man as Hayling, or that never had man what might truly be termed a sweeter smile. All the grimness used to go out of his grim face; its ugly, hard lines softened wonderfully, and Good-Nature wrote her name in sprawling capitals all over him.

Recognising as I did the horrible position in which this delicately bred girl now found herself, I did all within my power to alleviate her distress, and in this I was well backed up by my companion, who, though he did not say much, acted throughout as friend, chief, and elder brother. Indeed our assumed relationship proved of much value, and we did our utmost to support the delusion by always calling her sister.

But in the meantime the fog-horn was still bellowing in a way that shook the ship from stem to stern, and presently we caught glimpses of figures forward darting hither and thither. Then the blowing suddenly ceased, and we guessed that the alarm had been responded to. In fact, after a wait of a

minute or so, during which, I had no doubt, the mate was giving a graphic description of our raid, we beheld Murrell, Gupp, and about a dozen of the crew cautiously making their way towards us. None seemed in a particularly good-humour, while all approached the deck-house with a reserve which was almost ludicrous. Still, in this they showed much wisdom; for how were they to know what reception awaited them aft?

They seemed surprised to find the doors of the companion open and the way clear. Some of the men passed within, others came round the after-part of the house. It was then our whereabouts was discovered, and the cry of our discoverers soon brought the others crowding round. At the same time they all had a good view of Hayling's face as he sat calmly smoking his pipe.

Murrell, Gupp, and half a dozen of the more adventurous advanced until Hayling cried out sharply, "Halt!" This brought them to in an instant, and then the big fellow continued in his blindest tones, "Please stand where you are."

"Why should we?" cried the mate.

"Because I have no wish for a closer acquaintance."

"Rubbish! What right have you in there? Come out."

"This is my right," said Hayling, tapping the barrel of the Winchester; "and I'll come out when it suits me."

"Pooh!" cried the mate; "what rot! You surely don't suppose that you can hold out against the whole ship's company?"

"I'm going to try," said the big fellow. "At any rate, I have no wish further to cultivate the acquaintanceship of you or that infernal rogue by your side."

This allusion to Mr. Gupp sent that gentleman pale with anger, and as his face still bore some prominent signs of Hayling's handiwork, his contortions were not over-pleasant to witness. He muttered something extremely rude, and looked the vengeance he would like to take, but the painful memory of the thrashing Frank had given him rather curbed his tongue. He was well aware that every man present knew he had received it in a fair stand-up give and take, and that knowledge had its influence even on him.

"Well," said the mate, "we'll discuss that later on. In the meantime, you'd better think this out while I go below and have a yap with

the old man—that is, if you haven't murdered him?"

"Oh, no," said Hayling meaningly, "that's not in my line. You'll find him below in his room safe enough, if, perhaps, a little inconvenienced. It was an absolute necessity, which I am sure he will know how to appreciate."

The two white blackguards scowled again and turned away, though before they went below they set some men to watch us.

Hayling calmly utilised the window-sill to knock the ashes from his pipe; and then turning to me with a smile, he said—

"Well, old man, things are brightening up a bit. We shall have Macshiel here presently burning with outraged dignity. Phew!" and he stretched his big arms and threw up his head just as an animal will as it unconsciously tests its own strength. Then catching sight of the anxious face of the girl, he turned to her with a smile—the smile that was always on his face when he spoke to her—

"My sister thinks I am very wicked. Is that not so?"

"I am afraid you are very rash," she said.

"Have I, then, succeeded in deceiving you

too? Don't you know that in reality I'm horribly afraid, but that I see the absolute necessity of assuming an indifference I am far from feeling?"

"I know you are not afraid—at least, not for yourself," she added in an undertone.

He moved nearer to her, while I took up a better position at the window, and he spoke with such a gay indifference of our position that I wondered if he really knew how serious it was—wondered, and then felt myself burn at my own folly.

In about ten minutes there was a stir by the companion-way, and almost immediately the captain appeared, with Murrell and Gupp on either side. His step was somewhat uncertain, and his face looked more pinched and cadaverous than ever, but his eyes seemed to burn with the venom of a dozen men.

He, like the others, continued boldly to advance, until Hayling cried, "Halt!"

"Who tells me to halt?" he shouted, something of the lost dignity coming back to him.

"I do," said Frank; and again he rested the barrel of the rifle on the window-sill.

The captain came to a sudden standstill,

and then fell back a pace or two. He saw that if by accident the weapon went off his body was right in the way of the bullet.

"Put that thing down," he cried testily, "and listen to reason."

"I have listened to too much reason," was the hot reply. "Your reasoning has sent you well on the way to hell, and you want me to follow in your footsteps."

Macshiel smiled freely enough, but answered with some impatience—

"You seem to forget that I am the captain of this ship."

"I remember that you were; those two blackguards beside you are the master now. I know what you are, and I know what I have to expect. But I mean to stay here as long as I can, and I shall resist the efforts of you or any one else to dislodge me."

He scowled, they all three scowled, and Luiz, the engineer, who came up at that moment, scowled most of all.

"There is one other matter. You have our lady passenger with you?"

"That is so."

"She may presently find her position very dangerous. We have no quarrel with her. If

she will come out, I will give you my word that she shall not be molested in any way."

The person referred to, who during this conversation had leaned forward excitedly listening to every word, here rose, and resting one hand on Hayling's shoulder and the other on the sill, looked out.

"You have been very good to me, Captain Macshiel, and I want you to believe that I am duly grateful. I would willingly trust myself with you, for I believe you would keep your word ; but I know you have no longer the power to protect me."

"Who says so ? "

"I fear so."

"You mean you prefer to throw in your lot with these pig-headed fools. Very well. I have given you your chance. Whatever happens to you now is your own fault. Not the master of my own ship, ain't I ? " he cried angrily. "By God, I'd like to know who is ! "

This thought was capable of infinite development. I saw that by the angry way he received it. Bad as he was, he did not forget that a man of his rank ought to be shown a certain amount of deference. Outlaw he

might be, banned he might be ; but while he trod the deck of the *Pulo Way* there should be no other master.

I saw this, I knew his pride, and I was glad. A man in dire straits welcomes any hope. If we could only succeed in setting these rascals one against the other, our prospects would proportionately brighten.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ATTACK ON THE WHEEL-HOUSE

IN the meantime Macshiel and his officers withdrew as far forward as the companion-way, where they formed themselves into a little group, and began excitedly to discuss the situation. Violent were the gestures in which they indulged, and occasionally an angry sound came floating aft. Threatening faces were turned towards us, and some of the men fingered their guns in a way that was anything but reassuring. Still, I knew they would be careful, though I had little doubt as to the ultimate end of the business. Yet even that to some extent was problematical ; surrender, on the other hand, had not even the merit of uncertainty.

Presently the mate detached himself from the little group and came towards us, holding

up his hands to show that there was no ill-design in his mission.

"Look here, you chaps," he said, "the old man doesn't want any more fuss and bother. He's quite willing to forget and forgive if you'll come out and lay down your arms."

"Can't be done," said Hayling. "I know the old man."

"Then you intend to defy us?"

"It's defence, not defiance," was the reply; and he smiled grimly as he used this bit of hackneyed political jargon.

"And what of the others?"

"They must do as they please."

"I shall not go," said the girl.

As for myself, I had no intention of quitting comparative security for that in which I had absolutely no faith.

"Of course you know what will happen?" said the mate.

"I think we can guess," replied Hayling. "But if you value your skin, don't come too close."

"You can't value yours over-much."

"I don't. But as it's all I've got, I mean to take care of it."

The mate went back to the little group, and

we saw him shake his big head. There was something emphatic about the action which shut out the mere idea of further argument. Sullenly impotent were the faces that turned our way. Then one by one the men slunk off, leaving two of their number to keep guard—one on either side of the deck-house.

By this time the evening was well advanced, and we guessed that no attack would be made upon our position between then and complete darkness, under cover of which we had little doubt that some sort of attempt would be made. For the better security of the girl we built a formidable breastwork in one of the far corners of the house, a structure which consisted of all the odds and ends we could lay our hands on. Behind this we believed she would be absolutely safe, even supposing the bullets penetrated our stronghold.

Hayling and I took turn and turn about at the window, a slit of about six inches in width being left open on either side for that purpose. Also, for a deadlier purpose, if necessary; though, being anything but a fire-eater, I sincerely hoped that Macshiel would adopt the more Christian method of starving us into submission.

Slowly the night crept on, and an extremely dark, unpleasant night it was. Hayling had awakened me from an ugly dream, the memory of which plagued me vilely. For the moment I thought Gupp was upon me, and it took some little time to get rid of the fancy.

Frank led me to the window and cautioned the utmost vigilance.

"It's as black as the devil out there," he whispered. "So keep your eyes skinned, old man."

I took up my station, and kept my eyes fixed upon the spot where the guards ought to have been, but never a glimpse of them did I get. In a vague sort of way I seemed to make out the deck-house and the mast that sprouted up through it, though, knowing the lay of the land, I am more inclined to believe that I saw them only in fancy; for the night was of that intense, still darkness which seems peculiar to tropic regions. Certain I am that I saw nothing of the guards; indeed, I knew not whether the guards were set or not.

It is a queer sensation, this waiting in the dark to be attacked; for though you are assured that danger is very near, you have no idea from which point it will come, or in what

manner. Moreover, there is much distress and confusion in darkness ; indeed, a night attack does not seem a clean way of doing things.

I am perfectly certain that I was as wide awake at the moment as I am now. I recollect but a minute or so before rashly peering through the aperture, the better to gain a comprehensive view. Then I immediately shifted from that window to the other, and was about to repeat the foolish act, when of a sudden there was a flash and a roar, and I saw an arm protruding through the window I had just quitted. Indeed, I had been seen, without a doubt, and the bullet was fired at the space which had lately been filled by my body. Had I not instantly changed my position I might have been hit—probably would have been—and why not as well in the head as in the shoulder ?

I immediately raised my arm and fired. In my excitement I even tried to catch a glimpse of my assailant, with the result that, ping, ping, flew a couple of bullets near my head, breaking the glass and splintering the wood.

Hayling was instantly by my side. In a few words I told him what had happened,

though the situation explained itself. Carefully he looked out, but the darkness which had befriended them also befriended him, for though he saw nothing, he was not seen.

There was a slight movement behind us, and then slowly came the low voice of the girl—

“Are you hurt?”

“No. It was merely an alarm.”

“Thank God!”

“We shall be all right, never fear.”

It was several seconds before Hayling spoke, but in that time his voice had grown wonderfully soft. I should like to have seen his eyes then, though I fear I might have been somewhat ashamed of my own. And it was only the simple “Thank God!” of a frightened girl.

“Please keep behind your barricade,” he added, “and lie flat. No harm must come to our Lady of the Sea.”

Poor girl! I couldn’t see her, for which I was devoutly thankful; but I heard her sigh as she crept back to her shelter. It was a pretty thing to lie there staring up into the darkness, afraid of every sound, knowing not at what moment the horrid firing would begin.

How she, who had been delicately nurtured, lived through that night is more than I can say.

Hayling and I, sitting, or rather reclining back some distance, each took a window—he the port, I the starboard ; and there we lay, our eyes glued to the aperture, our weapons ready for immediate use. We spoke no word, but we knew what each had to do ; and though to me man-killing was a new and disagreeable occupation, I felt but slightly the near tie of brotherhood. I guessed how my companion gripped his rifle ; I pictured the grim, hard face that was turned to the aperture. And behind the barricade lay the girl, with fear in her heart, but a prayer on her lips.

It was almost a relief when the besiegers opened fire, for what with the darkness and the horror of the suspense life was fast becoming unendurable. At the first discharge Frank called to me to fling myself flat, an order I was not slow to obey ; for just then I had no particular wish to check the headlong career of any too impulsive bullet. But I so contrived that I still managed to keep my eye on the window, and I had no doubt that my companion was doing the same.

There was a great cracking of arms, a

smashing of glass, and splintering of wood. Occasionally a ball came hissing through the apertures and crashed either into the roof or against the big wheels; for there were a pair of them, and they took up all the centre of the house. Now and again a bullet that had forced its way through the thick shutter fell with an ominous thud on to the grating which covered the floor; but though the besiegers splintered the shutters and shattered the panels of the doors, none of us was touched.

By the number of shots fired, the attacking party must have found shooting at the wheel-house a highly exhilarating occupation. It at least had the advantage of being a safe one; but as no return to their fire was attempted, they must necessarily have wondered how it fared with the besieged; and one, more imprudent than his fellows, showed himself at the port window. It was only for a moment, but almost simultaneously with his appearance Hayling fired. The shot was followed by a horrid shriek, as the man fell clattering to the deck.

A minute or so of acute tension followed, during which I had no doubt that the wounded man had crawled back to his companions;

then of a sudden an angry volley was poured into us. Yet it proved but an impotent outburst, merely scattering a few more splinters. Hayling chuckled, and I knew by the click of the spring as the empty shell was ejected that he was calmly preparing for a further emergency.

A few desultory shots followed the volley, and then the firing ceased altogether. For a little while we lay quite still, and then came Hayling's voice—

“Any one hit?”

I waited for the girl to speak, and when the reassuring “No” came, I felt that we were not utterly abandoned of God.

“And my brothers?” said she.

“Not a touch,” said Hayling.

“Not a touch,” I echoed.

She sighed, and something that sounded uncommonly like a devout ejaculation forced its way through the gloomy air.

For a long time after this we remained unmolested, while, by certain sounds that reached us, we guessed that grog was sent round, which in the present uncertain state of things, was an extremely judicious piece of generalship. But though unmolested, neither Hayling nor

I relaxed our vigilance for a moment. Further sleep that night was no more to be thought of, and all through the long dark hour that preceded the breaking of day we crouched by the window, waiting for a sign, listening to every sound.

And so slowly the long night wore through, and I, who had been unaccustomed to such work, felt my eyelids grow stiff and heavy in spite of my determination not to suffer by comparison with my companion. And yet I started guiltily at the low exclamation which escaped him, and knew by the shamed way my eyes threw off their heaviness that I was not worthy of all freedom from suspicion.

"What is it?" I whispered, after first looking and seeing nothing.

"Day," he muttered.

A low sigh of relief came from the corner where the girl lay.

Though I doubted not that day was breaking somewhere, I saw no sign of it as I peered out into the darkness. But this was one of those things in which I was sure my companion could not be at fault, and I inwardly blessed the light which I knew might burst forth at any moment.

As I stared into the deep shadow which the high bulwarks projected along the deck, I suddenly became impressed with the fact that that shadow concealed a still deeper shadow, and, what was more, that the deeper shadow was moving contrary to the laws of shadows. But the darkness was still extremely dense, and I worried myself with much conjecture. After all, a fellow in my position was likely to see an enemy in every shadow, hear something unpleasant in every splash of the sea.

But, at the same time, I held my revolver in readiness, for though until that night, I had never pointed a weapon at man with intent to kill—and I admit to sundry inheroic qualms at the thought—still I remembered where I was and what I owed to those who had suddenly grown so near and dear to me. If, therefore, the shadow developed as I expected, I would have to shoot, but in my heart I hoped that I might not kill.

As I watched I felt convinced that something ominous was going on in the gloom of the bulwarks. Indeed, even in the uncertain light the darker shadow seemed imperceptibly to creep closer, and I was not sure that other similar shadows were not creeping in its wake.

I strained my eyeballs till they stung with pain, and was about to acquaint Hayling with my suspicions, when the day of which he had spoken suddenly shot a broad, dull shaft of light right through the heart of the darkness. But dull as it was it instantly transformed the face of things, and I immediately perceived at least half a dozen men crawling towards us in the gloom.

Recognising the proximity of the danger, my humane scruples vanished; I took quick but careful aim at the first man and fired. The shriek that left him told me he was hit. Simultaneously with the cry he bounded out on to the deck, threw up his arms, shrieked again, and fell. Then scrambling hurriedly to his knees, he crawled forward, toppling over in his haste.

Almost at the same time Hayling fired, and those other shadows, transforming themselves into men, made a sudden dash at us. This, so far, was the most desperate assault we had encountered, the enemy evidently being of the opinion that this was their last chance until night came again. But, whatever their hope, they were not fated to achieve success. I couldn't for the life of me tell how it was done;

but I know I rapidly emptied my revolver into their ranks, and this time without any humane scruples. I saw two of their number fall prone upon the deck, while another drove back upon the bulwarks, and then with a howl skipped away forward. By the cracking that was going on beside me I knew that Hayling was hard at work, and though I dared not look his way, I felt an awful, secret delight in the companionship of this strange man.

It was a close, hot fight, and when at last the enemy retreated, I could scarcely believe that I had come through the engagement unscathed. Indeed, I felt my head and face with some trepidation, for it seemed impossible that so many bullets should sing past my ears without touching me.

"All well?" said Hayling.

"All well," I answered.

"And our Lady of the Sea?"

"Safe," she said. "And you?"

"Going very strong," was his cheery reply.

"Some of those chaps won't want any breakfast this morning."

I could not help thinking how easily we might have been in the same plight; for now that the sudden danger was over I felt but a

feeble glow of satisfaction. Still, I made some remark which doubtless seemed to him indicative of joy.

"But you are not hurt?" she persisted.

"I! Not in the least. You don't suppose I'm going to let a beggarly pig-eye hurt me?" And all the time the blood was running down his body from a nasty wound in the shoulder, while he surreptitiously shook more blood from his torn ear. All this I never knew until some time after; but it was just like him to make the best of things, and bear personal discomfort with the utmost philosophic indifference.

Gradually the morning dawned, and one by one the dark outlines of the deck hamper were distinctly limned on the grey background of the early day. Then ray by ray it gradually pierced our prison-house, until at last I could clearly distinguish the face of my companion. At first I thought his pallor was but a reflection of the indifferent light, and I paid no heed to it; but as the day grew stronger I saw that some other explanation was necessary.

I leant across to him, and in my excitement whispered rather loudly—

"Frank, you've been hit!"

He pressed his finger to his lip and gave me

a warning look. But it was too late. The girl had heard, and on turning round I saw that she had risen and was coming towards us.

“ You are wounded, Mr. Hayling ? ”

“ Just a scratch,” said he. “ Nothing that will interfere with business;” and he smiled in his old, brave, reckless way. But even as he smiled his face changed, and he grasped the wheel for support.

“ You are ill,” she said. “ Tell me what I can do.”

“ Nothing, I assure you. It’s nothing ;” but he shut his teeth savagely, the furrow in his brow deepened, and I saw his fingers crimson at the tips as he gripped harder the spoke of the wheel.

“ Mr. Hayling, I insist. I must do something. Let me be of some use.”

“ Well,” said he, “ I think a little breakfast would not be amiss. Ravensford can make an examination, and you shall know the result.”

So she went back among the provisions, while Hayling proceeded to divest himself of a portion of his upper garments. I found the wound to be an ugly flesh one, but, with the exception of the loss of blood, not dangerous.

“ Well ? ” quivered a soft voice by my side.

Turning round, I encountered the anxious face of the girl.

"Not serious," I said. "All we need do now is to dress the wound. Nature will do the healing."

In a twinkling she had set to work with deft fingers. Where she got the beautiful strips of white linen I will not venture to guess; but I have a sort of vague recollection of hearing the tearing of material as she busied herself with the breakfast.

When she had finished she looked up into Frank's face without speaking, and he looked down into hers, and I thought he grew a shade paler; but this time I doubt if the pain in his shoulder was the cause.

"Thank you, Miss Waltham."

"My name is Ethel," she said.

"Thank you—Ethel."

And from that moment we were Ethel, and Frank, and Tom—we the big brothers and she the little sister for whom either of us would have laid down his life.

CHAPTER XV

CAPTAIN AND MATE

BUT it must not be supposed that we neglected to keep a sharp look-out forward during this dressing of the wound, though happily we were unmolested. The day was now rushing swiftly up out of the sea, and if in the darkness our assailants failed to dislodge us, they were not likely to risk our fire in the broad light. Occasionally I caught a glimpse of an ugly pig-eye peering round the deck-house forward; but by the way it drew back upon seeing me I guessed it must have feared somewhat our accuracy as marksmen. Indeed, out on the deck lay several ominous-looking splashes—splashes which the risen sun tipped with the colour of blood.

We ate our breakfast in peace, and then sat

down to wonder what the day would bring forth. Not that we had much to say on the subject; for from whatever point we approached it, each road led but one way, and that was not the road we wished to travel. Even Hayling's gloomy old face lowered more darkly than ever, though he always smiled in his grave, serious way whenever spoken to. It was when he lost himself in thought that the face reflected his mind. Ethel, in her far corner, lay quite still most of the time; but occasionally she crept towards us with wine and food, and then it was "Courage, courage," and a silent pressure of the hand.

And so the morning came and went, and during the whole of that time the ship remained oppressively quiet. We knew well enough that the sentries were set to watch us; for in spite of their cleverness we caught an occasional glimpse of an ugly, peeping face. But no one else appeared. The superior persons had evidently taken full advantage of their superiority, and probably were complacently snoring below.

If it had been a terrible night, it at least had been an exciting one; whereas the dull hours of daylight dragged themselves painfully along.

Not that I wanted any more fighting. Indeed, speaking personally, I had had enough to last me to the end of my life. Some fellows are more warlike. It is a matter of taste. It was not more fighting I wanted, only I had grown plaguy curious, and was eager to get at the intentions of the enemy. If I have to fight, I like to fight and get it over. I have no stomach for watching and dodging and everlastingly being on the alert. Even Hayling began to frown most ominously as he watched the slow hours roll along. The awful uncertainty of the whole thing was worse than any organised attack.

But shortly after noon the sound of voices in the companion-way reached us, and presently a dirty handkerchief attached to a brass rod was seen protruding from the starboard doorway. The mate immediately followed, for it was he who bore the flag of truce. Behind him came Luiz the engineer, and half a dozen dirty scoundrels from the engine-room.

As Murrell approached I instantly saw that he was under the influence of drink. He shuffled and rolled awkwardly in his gait, and every second or so wet his dry lips with his tongue. Waving the handkerchief above his

head, he continued to advance until Frank called upon him to stop, and as he did not seem inclined to obey the order, he suddenly found himself covered by the Australian's rifle. I think, too, that he saw the grim face behind it, for he pulled up short and retreated a couple of paces, waving the gun away with his big hand.

"Nice way to treat a flag of truce!" he protested.

"Didn't you hear me tell you to stop?"

"And suppose I did?" he growled.

"If you did," said the Australian, "you were a fool not to obey."

"I ain't the only fool," retorted the mate, "though I'm not the one to turn a gun on a flag of truce."

Hayling's heavy brows went together as he said sharply—

"What do you want?"

"I have something to propose. This mutiny of yours is playing the deuce with the discipline aboard. The ship can't be worked satisfactorily with you fellows cooped up here, potting every man that pokes his nose round the corner. So if you're willing we'll try and come to terms."

"Oh, thank you," said Frank; "we're very comfortable here."

"Well, you know, Hayling, you can't expect to hold out if we set to in earnest."

"We can try."

"Oh, but it's rot, you know," replied the man irritably; "besides, it's much more reasonable to come to terms."

"And what are the terms?"

"Well, having duly considered the provocation, we have taken a lenient view of this outbreak; and we are quite willing to overlook your insubordination and pardon the passenger and the girl."

"I accept the terms," said Hayling. "I am deeply grateful."

"Oh, but you must come out of the wheel-house," protested the mate.

"Why?"

"Well, if for nothing else, to show your confidence in us."

"But I have no confidence in you."

"Well, of all the ungrateful swine——" began the mate.

But the Australian cut him short.

"Look here, Murrell, there's no need for us to bandy compliments. We have no intention of leaving our present quarters."

"Then, by God, we'll drive you out."

"Oh well, you must do that if you can. Here we are, and here we intend to remain. Now right about! Quick march!"

The anger and amazement of the mate would have been highly ludicrous under other circumstances. First he stood staring blankly at us, then he shuffled his feet this way and then that, anger and irresolution battling for supremacy. Two or three times he opened his mouth as if to let go at us, though nothing but a frothy bubbling left his lips. Then with a sudden furious gesture he flung his flag of truce, brass rod and all, savagely into the star-board scuppers, swung round, and marched off, his dirty scallywags at his heels.

Hayling watched them with a curious scowl until they disappeared forward. Then he turned to me, the anger still in his face.

"Cool!"

"Rather!" said I.

"What do you make of it?"

"It looks to me as though they were getting sick of the job."

"I think you're right. What says our little sister?"

Ethel, who had been peering through the wheels, here advanced.

"Oh, Mr. Hayling—I mean Frank—I hardly know what to think. The whole thing is too terrible for words."

"I am so sorry for you; but you do believe that Tom and I are doing what we think is best?"

"I know—I know. But when is it likely to end?"

He smiled gravely, perhaps a little reprovingly. The light was not good, but I thought she flushed.

"I have about another round for my Winchester," he said. "Tom will be able to tell you how much revolver ammunition we have left."

He did not say any more, and his voice was gentle enough, as it always was when he spoke to her, yet the reproach stung like the lash of a whip. For a little space she swayed irresolute, and then before either of us knew what was going to happen she was on her knees before him, sobbing bitterly and crying out for him to forgive her.

Seizing her by both hands, he raised her gently, and as with streaming eyes she looked

imploringly up into his face, he patted her head as a father would and told her there was nothing to forgive. But she insisted upon hearing him pronounce her pardon, and she buried her face on his breast, and her form shook with sobbing. And Hayling never spoke a word ; but he looked down at the fair head so close to him, and I saw his eyebrows go together and his under-lip tighten. Then the old sweet smile came back to his face, and he raised her hands once more.

"Now that we understand each other there must be no more tears.

"No, no, I won't cry any more ;" and she turned to me, her eyes wet and glistening. "You are not ashamed of me, Tom ; you, too, will pardon ? "

"Ethel !"

But she knew what I meant, though I was ever a fool at voluble expression.

This little incident did much to clear the air, instantly bringing us into closer sympathy with each other. Nothing further was said about it ; but as Hayling lit his pipe he looked at me through the tobacco clouds, and each knew what the other thought. As for Ethel, the little outburst of womanly weakness had en-

abled her to creep right into our hearts ; and by the changed, happier look on her face I believe she knew it.

About an hour after this we were suddenly startled by the sound of many voices which came floating up from the saloon. At first it was a confused, incoherent sort of noise, as though sundry people were shouting in divers tones ; but gradually the noise resolved itself into something like order, and the strains of a well-known chanty reached our ears. The picture could easily be imagined—the saloon full of smoke, the reckless blackguards, each with a tumbler of whisky before him, shouting and singing excitedly, or lounging in the easiest of attitudes, puffing his cheap cigar and gulping the insidious spirit ; the captain in his chair at the head of the table, nodding over his grog, Mr. Gupp on his right and Mr. Murrell on his left. Mr. Gupp, being a man of exceeding versatility, would naturally sing the solo part, and while the others took up the chorus he could get a pull at his cigar or take a mouthful of grog. I even fancied I could catch the nasal intonation (true sailor tone) as he began the famous old chanty—

“ Were you ever in Dundee ?
Bonnie laddie, Hieland laddie !
Were you ever upon the spree ?
Bonnie Hieland laddie ! ”

And then up came the old refrain with startling distinctness—

“ Hey, ho, away we go,
Bonnie laddie, Hieland laddie !
Hey, ho, away we go,
Bonnie Hieland laddie ! ”

This went on for some time, and as meanwhile we knew the whisky must be flowing freely, it was not surprising that a quarrel put an end to the jollification, though the development was entirely unforeseen.

There had been silence below for some minutes, when suddenly the babel of voices reached us again. It seemed as though each man was shouting at the top of his voice, trying to shout down the fellow next to him, and presently in the midst of it all a shot was fired.

Hayling looked at me and smiled grimly.

“ A row ? ”

“ Rather,” said he. “ There’ll be some fun

if the brutes will only row enough. Just pull your window to a little. We shall have them up on deck in a minute."

I did as I was bidden, and also completed a hurried examination of my revolver, when the captain staggered out through the deck-house, his hair flying wildly, his face fearfully pale and emaciated. Reeling to the side and clutching one of the stanchions for support, he swung round and fired into the companion several shots in rapid succession. Then, without looking round, he darted away forward, and after him came the mate, a knife in his hand, his flabby face almost purple with rage. Seeing which way Macshiel had gone, Murrell immediately gave chase, while a moment or two after Luiz and Gupp staggered up to see the fun.

Apparently oblivious of our presence, the Portugee stepped out upon the deck and urged on the pursuer with hands and voice; but Gupp, drunk as he was, had not forgotten the Australian, so he contented himself with exposing as little of his precious person as possible and casting furtive glances in our direction.

But in the meantime the captain had run

forward along the starboard side, and presently we saw him returning along the port, and his cadaverous little face was more hideous and fuller of terror than ever, for Murrell, with his knife, was close upon his heels, gasping vengeance and oaths. And it is as well Macshiel did not see the face of his chief officer, for if the blasphemies frightened him, one look at the hideous face of the mate would have petrified him with terror. Truly at the best of times Murrell's face was not one which appealed to the æsthetic side of humanity, but now it was more revolting and hideous than ever; and as I watched him stretch out his great hand to seize Macshiel, the look of joy was so fiendishly disgusting that I shivered where I stood.

As he clutched the captain by the shoulder Macshiel suddenly swung round, and with a shriek of terror banded his empty pistol fair in the mate's face. Then he turned and bounded aft; but as he passed the companion Gupp, who had crossed over to the port side, shot out his leg, and the skipper went clattering to the deck. However, bruised and shaken as he must have been, he scrambled to his feet with incredible quickness, and was making



"He clutched the captain by the shoulder."

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straight for us, when the mate, his face now more hideous than ever with the blood trickling down it, slashed at him with his knife.

The little man gave a horrible shriek, and turning round sprang like a wildcat at the mate, and tore at his face and hair. But Murrell, almost blinded and maddened as he was, slashed viciously at him again and again, swearing frightfully the while. Macshiel hissed, and spat, and shrieked, and seemed suddenly to have gone mad with rage and terror; but he could do nothing with the burly mate and that resistless knife. Seeming to recognise this, he suddenly sprang back, and with an imploring cry of terror flew towards us; but ere he had taken half a dozen steps he tripped and clattered once more to the deck. Then, crawling on his hands and knees, he turned a horrified face to us, and cried pathetically, "Help! help!"

But even had we been inclined to help him the opportunity was not then given us, for the mate was on him again, and once more the horrid knife flashed in the sunlight. But before it had time to descend a shot rang out. The mate drew himself up stiffly, dropped his

knife, and then lurched backwards against the deck-house. This he clutched wildly, as if to save himself ; but either fright or injury robbed him of the requisite power, and he fell clattering to the deck.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PASSING OF MACSHIEL

I TURNED to Hayling, the muzzle of whose rifle was still smoking, and he said—

“I hope I haven’t done wrong. Anyway, the old man’s the best of a bad bunch.”

Whatever the captain may have been, or whatever he may have done, there was nothing now but pain and humility upon the hideous little face that was turned imploringly towards us.

“Help! help! He will kill me!” and he wrung his wretched hands and whined like a miserable woman.

“I think not,” said Frank. “At least, not just at present.”

Indeed, Murrell lay flat where he had fallen, apparently dead.

"I tell you my life's not safe," continued Macshiel, as though that were of any importance, a curious note of irritation giving an earnest emphasis to his voice. "He's a savage swine, a soor," the man went on, apparently oblivious of his own antecedents. "If you do not give me shelter, I shall die;" and he never took his eyes off Hayling's face, but inch by inch crawled nearer and nearer the wheel-house.

"You can hardly expect me to give you shelter," said Frank.

"I've been a friend to you, Hayling," whined the man. "Help me, and I'll be a better friend still."

It was odd that he never looked behind to see what had become of his enemy, whose fall he did not seem to mark. But perhaps instinct served him in place of eyes. All he seemed to see was Hayling and the long, slender barrel of the rifle. He watched eagerly for the first wavering shadow upon that hard, scowling face.

"We can't be friends," said Frank.

"Well, then, I will be what you wish, only save me from these cowardly wretches. Don't be hard on me, Hayling. God knows, I'm damned sorry for what I've done."

It seemed incredible that this whining, canting wretch and the brute who had so mercilessly sent the *Chung-Tong* to the bottom could be one and the same man.

Hayling was silent for a few moments, nor anxious as I was, did I intrude upon his thoughts; for I had much faith in his judgment. Presently he said, though I thought it was a triumph of will, "You can't come here."

"But I'm dying!" gasped the man.

"Sorry," said the Australian grimly; "but you must die out there."

There was no doubt of the serious condition of the captain, who supported himself on his hands and knees with the utmost difficulty, and though I wavered greatly myself I did not forget how cruelly Frank had been treated.

But Macshiel here caught sight of Ethel, and he immediately addressed himself to her, imploring her to intercede for him.

"I am badly wounded, miss," he said. "I fear I am dying. If I am sent back to those men, they will kill me. I may be a bad man, miss, but I was always good to you." And this was true, and much more in his favour than he imagined.

"We are afraid to trust you, Captain Macshiel," said the girl.

"Afraid to trust a dying man?" he queried, a ghastly smile struggling painfully across his face.

She laid her hand on Hayling's arm.

"Frank."

"Yes." This without looking, for during the whole of this time he had never taken his eager glance from the man before him and the deck beyond.

"He always treated me kindly."

"You want to give him shelter?"

"I would like to. He seems to be dying."

Hayling hesitated for a short space. Then he said, "Very well. It shall be as you wish." Calling to Macshiel, he cried, "Crawl up to the door, captain, and we will let you in."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Hayling," whined the man, as he began laboriously to crawl towards us. "I can't tell you how sorry I am that I ever——"

But Hayling cut him short. "Don't thank me. You were good to this lady. This is your reward."

Unheeding this curt reply, the poor wretch crawled painfully on, glad of any port in a

storm. As he dragged himself along, his right hand left a clot of blood on the deck, while with every movement of his body he seemed to suffer the most intense pain. Under Frank's directions I went and opened the door, he himself keeping his old post by the window, finger on trigger, eagle eye watching for the slightest move on the part of the enemy.

With little trouble I got the captain in and propped him against the wheel. Ethel at once took him in hand; and when I left him to resume my place by the window she was already holding some wine to his livid lips, while the whole wheel-house resounded with his moaning thanks and blessings. Simultaneously with my return to the window, Luiz, the engineer, stepped out from the companion and dragged the body of the mate back into the deck-house.

After this there was no more trouble, the enemy having retired with their wounded or dead to think or drink. Things had not turned out quite so well as Messrs. Gupp and Murrell had expected. Their wrath at not having dropped Hayling overboard, when they had the chance, may easily be imagined. Without him they would have met with little opposition,

whereas they were now confined to certain portions of the deck as assuredly as though they were prisoners.

All through the rest of that day some one was in constant attendance on the captain; but notwithstanding our utmost efforts he failed to improve. Indeed, the great gash in his side precluded the hope of any such possibility; but though, while imploring for admittance, he had prated enough of dying, he seemed to try to banish the thought once he had gained safe cover. In his talk, and he babbled incessantly, he admitted that the mate had seriously knifed him, but not so seriously as to render recovery impossible. And he talked much of the revenge he intended to take upon Murrell and Gupp and Luiz, and such of the crew as favoured the cause of the mate. Of Murrell and Gupp he could say nothing bad enough, and he warned us not to trust them, no matter what they promised, as our death was absolutely necessary to their existence.

Then between his yearnings for revenge would come pitiful whimperings over past follies; of things that were more than follies, though I doubt if he ever knew how bad he

really was. Bitterly he upbraided that weakness in him which had succumbed to temptation, and argued with himself, in a low, monotonous voice, that God, and not he, was answerable for his fall, since in him God had placed this weakness or the seeds of evil; and such consolation as he could gain from this no creature would grudge him, though assuredly the uneasy mouthings that followed belied the efficacy of his philosophy.

And so on through the day and far into the night he lay, now writhing and shrieking with pain, now vowing vengeance on the man who had struck him low, and now appealing to God, and now cursing Him. It was a trying ordeal for Ethel, and I begged of her to leave him to me, assuring her that I would call her if necessary; but no entreaty of mine would move her. The man was dying, she said, and she would not leave him. So I made her eat of the potted meats, and drink of the wine, and otherwise tried to fortify her for her desperate duty.

At midnight, just as I was about to wake Hayling, the captain rose with a low moan, and called eagerly for a light. That being quite out of the question, Ethel quieted him

as best she could; but he continued to moan pitifully, sobbing like a child, and murmuring under his breath, "God," and "Pardon," and otherwise behaving like the weak man who finds his burden too heavy for him to bear. Or perhaps he had not forgotten the teaching of his mother, the days of the beautiful, blind belief? Who shall judge?"

Ethel spoke to him gently, her voice coming through the gloom with a soft, singular emphasis that was all her own.

"No one," he replied huskily, as if in answer to a question. "I am quite alone. A lonely man; a lost, lonely soul. . . . Scotland, yes; but that's long ago. . . . In Hong-Kong, yes; next to Koon Win the compradore. She's a half-caste, but . . . and she may be sorry."

He died shortly after, and I stood guard at the door while Frank dropped him over the side.

"Poor beggar," he said, "what a mistake!"

And that was the epitaph of Captain Macshiel.

CHAPTER XVII

A PARLEY

THOUGH Hayling and I alternately kept guard, we were molested no more that night. Frequent alarms, chiefly the result of an excited imagination, occasioned a momentary uneasiness; but otherwise the time slipped peacefully along. Standing there in the dark, peering out intently on to the desolate deck, rendered the imagination extremely susceptible. It was so easy to fancy that in every shadow lurked an enemy, that it is little wonder the strained eyes eagerly lent themselves to furthering the delusions of the brain.

Though tired, I slept rather uneasily for a time; yet when I awoke the day was come. There stood Hayling against the window, the rifle beside him, his face turned from me. I

watched him for a short space in silence, wondering at the rigidity of his pose. Then a fearful thought came to me, and I moved. In an instant he turned. I smothered the short gasp of thankfulness.

Rising softly, so as not to wake the other sleeper, I moved to his side.

"Why, Frank, what time is it?"

"Early."

"Or late—which? Why didn't you call me?"

"I forgot."

Well, what could I say to such a fellow?

"How is the shoulder, old man?"

"Right as a trivet," said he. But then the beggar was sure to have said that, so I needn't have asked.

"Nothing stirring?"

"Nothing."

And so he relapsed into silence, being a man of few words. Not that the situation rendered discussion a necessity. We knew exactly our position, and what was demanded of us; what was to be done. Hayling seemed early to recognise that all the talking in the world was of little avail. We were in a tight corner, and the instinct of self-preservation exhorted us to

hold on to the last. That fact, palpable as the sea about us, obviated the necessity of all argument.

It was nevertheless with something of a sick throbbing of the pulses that I turned to greet Ethel. Only people placed as we were could fully realise the horror of the situation; but she bore it with remarkable fortitude, and if her spirits drooped no word which could be construed into an expression of misery ever left her lips. But as she came forward into the clear shaft of light which slid in through the slit in the shutter, there was no hiding the fact that she had suffered, and was suffering. I was afraid to say anything beyond expressing the hope that she had passed a fairly comfortable night; for I knew that her grief was already bubbling somewhere behind her eyes, and that a word would bring it gushing to the surface. So I looked the pity I dared not speak, and then turned to Hayling, who devoured her with strange, greedy eyes—fever eyes which at times shone almost unpleasantly. I guessed well enough what thoughts were surging in his brain: love, pity, and furious impotence. It was all as plain to me as though I gazed upon a mental photograph.

Yet when he spoke it was simply to repeat my own commonplace greeting.

And she, too, in a milder way, had acquired much of his taciturnity; took things as they came and never questioned. An admirable characteristic in its way, but not too good. Words are plentiful, and very few of them too precious to be wasted. Moreover, your brooding spirit is likely to attain an unpleasant development; and I sometimes wished that Hayling would curse a bit and smash things, or that Ethel would indulge in the luxury of a good cry. For myself, I was beginning heartily to hate the wheel-house, and but the extreme reserve of my companions prevented me from giving utterance to a natural irritability.

I watched while Ethel and Frank took a snack, and when he had finished he came and relieved me. Luckily we still had plenty of wine and provisions; but when one has wine for breakfast, dinner, and supper, one is apt to grow both unreasonable and ungrateful. Truth to tell, this enforced confinement was beginning to chafe me.

After breakfast Hayling and I lit our pipes, while Ethel drew near, and for some time we

sustained a desultory sort of conversation. But though bit by bit we went over the old ground, and even entered the domains of speculation, it was curious how we avoided that all-important question, How is this going to end? A dozen times it was on the tip of my tongue; I know it often faltered on hers; yet neither of us put it. As for Hayling, I suppose he knew, and knowing, it was not necessary to ask.

Presently the Australian, who was by the window, turned to Ethel, and said—

“Our friends are stirring.”

“But perhaps they will not fire.”

He smiled.

“I would rather you sought shelter.”

“This is horrible, this having to hide directly there is any danger. I wish I was a man.”

Again the grim Australian smiled. I knew he was glad she was not. However, away she went to her barricade, and I took my place at the starboard window.

As before, a dirty handkerchief was waved from the door of the companion, and presently Gupp, holding the flag of truce, stepped out on the deck. He was followed by Luiz, the

Portugee, and four or five other rascallions. As he approached the early sunlight fell full upon his flabby face, his shifty, clotted eyes, making the man look as though he had just awakened from a drunken sleep.

He advanced nonchalantly until Hayling ordered him to stop—an order he at first seemed half-disinclined to obey ; but thinking better of it he pulled up suddenly, and looked into the muzzle of Frank's rifle.

"I'm glad to see that you are prepared for us," he said, affecting a bantering tone. But the smile was a pale one, and the eyes shifted uneasily.

Hayling's rigid face never relaxed for a second. There was no love lost between these two, and he, for one, made no attempt to hide his feelings.

"What do you want?" he asked shortly.

I could see by Gupp's face that the tone offended him ; but he smiled again, only this time a little more unpleasantly.

"Well, I've something to tell you. You've given the mate a dollop of lead that don't agree with him."

"I meant to," said Frank.

"Good. But he's gone off his chump."

"About the best thing that could happen to him."

Mr. Gupp grinned, and thoughtfully began to fumble at his coat pocket.

"If you do that again," said Frank sharply, "I'll serve you the same way."

Gupp scowled horribly, and muttered something beneath his breath.

"I was only feeling for my handkerchief," he said.

Hayling frowned. Mr. Gupp's handkerchief was drooping sadly before his eyes as a flag of truce.

"I said he'd gone off his chump," repeated the gunner, breaking the ominous silence that followed this little unpleasantness. "I suppose the old man's done for?"

"He is."

"That's where the trouble comes in—the old man gone, and the mate off his chump."

Now, for the first time, a grim smile played round Hayling's mouth as he realised the situation.

"And you have come to make a proposal?"

"I have come to propose terms which ought to benefit both parties."

"What are they?"

"Well, it's this way," said Gupp. "We're in a mess, and we don't know where the blazes we are."

The corners of Frank's mouth twitched as he looked at the man; but he never relaxed his forbidding scowl.

"What is that to do with me?" he asked.

"It comes into the argument," said the gunner. "With the old man gone, and the mate off his chump, there's no one left to navigate the ship—but you."

"Well?" said Hayling coldly.

"Curse it, ain't it plain enough? There ain't no love in the matter; its mutual obligation, nothing more nor less. You navigate the ship as far as New Guinea, or somewhere west o' Port Darwin, and I'll guarantee that no one molests you during the voyage."

"And who will guarantee you?"

"That's rot on the face of it," said Mr. Gupp irritably, if not a little scornfully, "considering that we can't get there without you. That ought to be guarantee enough in itself."

"So you expect me to help you to elude justice."

"I didn't suppose that there would be any

love in it," he snarled, "but I didn't think you were altogether a fool. It's a fair deal. We give you life and freedom in exchange for your skill as a navigator. I think the balance of gratitude ought to be on your side."

"But since when did you acquire the control of our lives?" asked Hayling, in a slow, irritating voice.

"That's neither here nor there," replied the man, trying hard to control the rage which was palpably surging within him. "The question now is, are you willing to come to terms?"

"I shall want to consider, and to consult my friends. Please retire for a moment as far as the deck-house. I will signal when I want you."

"What rot!" said he, not budging.

"I told you to go forward," cried Hayling, sharply.

"Oh, all right. Hurry up, that's all."

When he and his followers had retired Frank flashed a look of inquiry at me. I say flashed, because the glance was momentary, his eyes rarely moving from the ruffians forward.

"Well, Tom, what conclusion have you arrived at?"

To be honest, I had arrived at no conclusion, though my inclinations favoured the armistice.

"Do you think the beggars can be trusted?"

"You heard his reply to that. I am necessary?"

"Till we reach the coast. But then?"

"My dear Tom, dead men tell no tales."

I shuddered. Hayling had a grim, cold-blooded way about him that at times was absolutely painful.

"But couldn't you pretend that you were taking us to the Australian coast, or wherever they want to go?"

"I think they could not be so easily fooled. Though Gupp may not know enough navigation to find his true position, he is not wholly ignorant of his whereabouts, or the course he wishes to steer. But presently we shall be among the islands, when a man wants to know what he is doing."

"And you think you could take the ship through these islands?"

"I labour under that impression," he replied dryly.

"And will you?"

"What says our sister?"

Thus appealed to Ethel came forward.

"You know best," was her reply. "You will do what is best."

"But do you think this man may be trusted?"

"No," said she; and there was no hesitation about the reply.

"Nor I," said he.

I remembered the warning of Macshiel, and how he bade us beware of the gunner and his associates.

"I am glad you are with me," said Hayling, "for I instinctively mistrust these offers of peace. True, he would not molest us while I was of use; but once our destination reached — What think you, Tom?"

I only thought one thing, and, sorry as I was to prolong the struggle, I told him so.

"Then," said he, "it is agreed. We stay where we are?"

"Agreed," said Ethel and I.

"Wise resolution," he muttered; then he was silent for a moment or two, and I knew he was thinking the thing out in his clear, penetrating way. The confinement was odious, but we were comparatively secure, and commanded an excellent position. If to us the

situation was only just tolerable, it was a sort of satisfaction to know that our unceasing vigilance caused the enemy infinite annoyance. If he ruled the deck forward, it was fairly obvious who ruled it aft.

Hayling waved for the gunner to advance, and towards us he came, grumbling that we had been a precious long time making up our minds.

"But we have succeeded," said Frank, frowning. Knowing the man, I guessed how difficult it was for him to be civil to Gupp. If I was not mistaken, Hayling yearned for one more go at the lumpy brute.

"Well, you accept, of course?"

"On the contrary, we decline."

"Do you mean to say you refuse?" cried the gunner, aghast.

"Precisely. If you want to land to the west of Port Darwin you must get there yourself."

"But, you fool, I can't get there. Presently we shall be among the islands. Do you know what that means?"

Hayling nodded, but said nothing.

"It means," said the gunner, "that we shall strike, and go to hell together."

"Don't be so sure of that," said Hayling.
"Speak for yourself."

"But you don't seem to understand," continued the man, in a more conciliatory tone, ineffectually striving to conceal his rage. "There's not a soul aboard can take this ship through the islands but you."

"And I don't intend to try."

"But don't you see, it's to your advantage as well as ours that we should land somewhere in safety? If we go down, you may bet your life that you'll go with us—and the girl along with you."

This was an afterthought, a sly dig, and it caught Hayling sharply in the ribs. Instinctively he turned to the girl, and I heard her whisper, "What is best for you is best for me."

He turned to Gupp. "I hope I may not have the honour of going down in your company."

The man's flat eyes contracted, and his whole demeanour betokened the most intense rage and disappointment.

"Once for all, do you refuse?" he cried.

"Yes," said Hayling, catching some of the fellow's quick imperiousness.

"Then it's to be war?"

"That's as you fancy. I've no particular wish for it myself, but I am always willing to oblige."

"Then look to it!" cried Gupp, his thick mouth quivering with passion. "We've a long account to settle, and, by God, I'll settle it now!"

Frank's face grew black as a thundercloud, and he clutched his rifle in a way that made Mr. Gupp fall back a pace or two.

"That's your place," said he, nodding forward. "That after deck-house limits your boundary. The next time you come beyond it leave your flag of truce behind."

"That I will, you swine!" hissed the gunner, "and you'll wish I'd brought it with me."

So without more ado he turned on his heel and rejoined his companions, and together they went below, leaving, as before, a man to watch us. For a time none of us spoke, though each was bursting with thought. Then Frank addressed the girl.

"Tell me, Ethel, have I done right?"

"What says Tom?" was her cautious reply.

"If he says no, I'll punch his head?"

"And if I say no, will you punch my head?"

"That is a question requiring some consideration."

"Then I do not intend to run any risk at present."

"Dear Lady of the Sea," he said, his voice instantly changing from gay to grave, "you know how much I sympathise with the horror of your position, but I honestly believe I am acting for the best. There are some reasons why I should take charge of this ship; but, considering the nature of these men, there are many more reasons why I should not. If I assume command, we may reasonably expect to pass through the islands in safety; but if I don't it is absolutely certain that this ship never will. Will this latter be to our advantage or otherwise? Time alone can tell. One thing is certain: To take them to the Australian coast would almost ensure their safety and our ruin. Dead men tell no tales."

It was a long speech for Frank; and though not as satisfying as one might wish, was clear enough. And as our fate seemed to be entirely in the hands of the gods, wrapped, as it were, in the problematical clouds of the future, there was nothing left but to sound a note of approval.

CHAPTER XVIII

BREAKERS

THE rest of that morning passed uneventfully. Occasionally some member of the crew was seen ascending or descending the companion, and once or twice Gupp himself appeared upon the scene. Nor was there any longer any hole-and-corner dodging about their coming or going. They walked down the middle of the deck as though utterly oblivious of our existence. But they did not forget that Hayling told them he should consider the after deck-house the limit of their boundary.

Shortly after noon that day a curious change came over the sea. Suddenly, as it seemed to us, a heavy cloud slid across the sun, and the glare of the tropic day was instantly transformed into an ominous twilight. Almost at

the same time strange little singing breezes blew across the ship, while that portion of the sea which could be seen through the small aperture grew dark and angry.

“A squall,” said Hayling.

But it was something more than a squall. When the first blow struck her, the old ship staggered and rattled like a crazy locomotive ; but instantly righting herself she darted forward with a hiss and a roar. Then suddenly the sky grew black, and down came the rain and the wind, the one a stunning deluge, the other roaring like a thing gone mad. Quite a rattle the big drops made as they crashed down on deck-house and deck, and Ethel, who stood beside me watching the storm, whispered excitedly—

“I shouldn’t like to be in that !”

At first it seemed as though Hayling’s prognostication would prove correct, and that this visitation would resolve itself into a fierce tropical squall ; for after the rain had ceased the wind seemed to die away. Yet seemed only ; for suddenly it veered towards the southwest, and after a few preliminary puffs blew steadily and furiously. Like magic the seas rose, and the *Pulo Way* immediately felt them.

She rattled, and rolled, and pitched, and even seemed to moan like a sentient being; and as we were right over the screw, which raced horribly, the discomfort of our position was increased tenfold.

However, we suffered nothing from the vengeance of Gupp, and the wrath of Nature seemed but a small thing by comparison. Whatever plans the gunner may have formed, and I had no doubt that he and that rascal Luiz had talked to some purpose, the elements had prevented him putting those plans into execution. It was quite work enough for Luiz to attend to his engines; anxiety enough for Gupp to watch the weather and the ominous way in which the ship rolled, or lay over to the surges which fell with fury upon her. Indeed, to venture amidships was an act of some temerity, for occasionally a lump of water swirled over that portion of the vessel, which, had it caught a man, would assuredly have carried him overboard. So, in a way, this sudden danger to the ship was a source of security to us.

What sun there was went down behind a cloud. There was a momentary angering of the west, and then semi-darkness and a fiercer

outburst of the storm. How the wind howled as it rushed by the masts and the rigging! Thump, thump, came the great lumps of seas as they flung themselves upon the brave little vessel. Sometimes they sent her spinning on her side at a desperate angle; sometimes they broke aboard her as though they would bear her down to destruction; but shaking herself like a dog, she would send the water hissing through the scuppers, or, with a leap, struggle to an even keel.

Though Luiz had wisely slowed his engines, we were yet shaken horribly and almost deafened with the racing of the screw; for whenever the ship dug her nose down into a hollow, and it happened with sickening regularity, the screw, free of the opposing watery element, rattled as though it meant to shatter the ship to pieces. Sometimes I was shaken so violently that I had to grasp the window-sill for support, while many minor inconveniences rendered life almost intolerable. Yet none complained, though each must have been heartsick and weary. And from the state of my own feelings I guessed what those of Ethel were. But never a word escaped her; never a suggestion of what she was enduring. For

her sake I prayed that all might end well ; but I feared, I greatly feared.

During the whole of that night the storm raged furiously, and throughout the long, tempestuous hours Hayling and I took it in turns to watch. But for all the molestation we suffered we might just as well have gone to sleep. Outside in the black night the wind screamed and panted viciously ; beneath us swirled and rattled the horrid screw ; but the crew, like prudent men, kept to their quarters. Indeed, the elements fought bravely for us on this occasion.

Towards morning the wind ceased altogether, the sea rapidly subsided, and daylight broke late through a thick, white fog. Forward of us the deck-house was faintly outlined, though, had we not known it to be there, we might have doubted the accuracy of our vision. Nothing else was visible ; apparently no one was moving ; but by the quicker throb of the screw I knew Luiz had taken advantage of the smoother water. Occasionally a long wave broke with a sullen roar ; a fitful gust of wind came sighing out of the mist. For the rest, there was a heavy, ominous stillness, which was almost painful.

Suddenly I saw Hayling bend closer towards the aperture, and by his attitude I knew that he was trying to hear more than to see. I too listened, listened intently. Yet I heard nothing but the crunch of the screw, the noise of the water.

After a few seconds of eager straining he turned to me.

"Tom, do you hear anything unusual?"

"Nothing."

"Try again."

Once more I strained every nerve, but with a like result. I could distinguish nothing singular in the sounds which reached my ears.

"Well?" said he.

"Nothing, old man."

"Strange," he muttered; and I saw that he was much perplexed.

"What was it like?"

"Like something I hope we may not encounter. Ah, there it is again! Did you hear it then?"

I had to confess once more that I heard nothing unusual.

"Perhaps I'm dreaming — fanciful," he mused. "The devil take it, Tom, I must pull myself together."

Unknown to us, Ethel had drawn near, and when Hayling had finished speaking she turned to him, saying, "I think I heard something, Frank."

"You did, eh?" said he quickly. "Tell me what it was like."

"It reminded me of the long rollers breaking on the beach."

"The very thing!" he cried. "Ah, there it goes again!"

There was no doubt of it this time. It came faintly, but it was just such another sound as the sea makes when it comes tumbling on to the shore.

"Breakers, Frank?"

"I'm afraid so."

"We shall be lost!" cried the girl.

"Let us hope not," said he. "You are not afraid, little sister?"

For a moment she could not speak; but he took her hand and patted it, and looking into her eyes gave her courage.

"No, I am not afraid," she said. "We are in the hands of God."

"And God has safely steered us through too many narrow waters to strand us now." And again the old sweet smile came to his

haggard face, and I saw her head drop over his great hand. What else happened I cannot say, for at that moment a sudden smarting mist swept across my eyes. The deuce take such mists, say I, for they are apt to make a man wonder what is the matter with him.

Soon the sound came again, this time with startling distinctness; then Hayling began to fidget.

“Where the deuce are they?” he muttered, meaning the crew. “No one about. Can’t they hear? God almighty!” as a clear, loud roar broke on our ears, “we shall be on top of it in a minute! Tom, old man, this is no time for striking. I think I’d better make for the bridge;” and he turned to the door, shouting just as though the man at the wheel could hear him, “Starboard, you infernal fool; hard a-starboard!”

But before he could get the door open we heard some shrill, excited cries forward, and almost at the same moment the ship struck.

At first I scarcely seemed to comprehend the shock, but the harsh tearing forward, as though the plates were being crunched and curled on the rocks, soon brought home the truth. A curious sick feeling passed through

me and left me quite indifferent. Perhaps I was weary of the struggle. I don't know; but this I declare, that the horror of my surroundings impressed me but little. It was not that I had any particular wish to die; but nevertheless I failed utterly to realise the situation. Now, looking back, it all seems clear and horrible enough; then, the confusion, and the fact that we had still the ship beneath us, though she was already filling by the head, relieved the hopelessness, the despair, which otherwise must have been mine.

Presently there was much confusion and a babel of screaming tongues. Half-defined shadows flitted hither and thither about the deck, crying wildly to each other, or executing an order in a half-frenzied state. Occasionally Gupp's voice came rolling aft, and I guessed that he had taken command of the ship. Luiz, too, after shutting off the steam, rushed up on deck, his imps at his heels; and as he came aft to work the boats I could easily distinguish his strange, hoarse voice cursing in broken English.

"The beggars are going off in the boats," said Hayling. "Don't you think we'd better get out and have a look?"

"Oh, be careful!" implored the girl.

"Trust us," said Frank. "But they'll not interfere with us. They have something much more important on hand."

So he opened the door, and together we stepped out on the deck, and coolly marched forward to where some men were busy clearing the falls, preparatory to lowering the boat. Whether they saw us or not I cannot say, but they worked on as if totally oblivious of our presence. After all, they had something else to think about.

Presently, a volley of oaths heralding his approach, Mr. Gupp came tearing aft. Seeing us but indistinctly through the mist, he yelled out, "Now then, skulkers, forward!" But, as we did not move, he came closer with hand upraised.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said, drawing back.

"Apparently," said Hayling. "You've done a fine thing now."

"Me done a fine thing!" he snarled. "By God, I know who's done it, and who shall pay for it, too."

"Anyway, you're in a beast of a mess."

"Oh, I can't stand talking to you. The

damned ship'll go to the bottom in a minute, and you and your pals along with her."

"I am glad you have no intention of accompanying us."

But with a contemptuous oath the gunner darted away in the mist. Hayling turned to me—

"You know what he means, Tom?"

"Precisely."

"What do you think?"

"If we have to die, I'd rather we died here than with them."

"But Ethel?"

"Let us ask her."

Hurriedly returning to the wheel-house we were admitted.

"The ship is really sinking?" she cried, turning a white, terrified face to Frank.

"I fear so. They are getting out the boats. They will put off from the ship immediately."

"And leave us here to die?"

"Perhaps Tom and I can prevail upon them to take you off."

"And what is to become of Tom and you?"

"We are to stay behind."

She slipped her right hand into his, her left into mine.

"Then I will stay behind with you."

The infernal mist grew thicker just then, and smarted so that it made my eyes ache—almost brought the water to them. I couldn't speak, and I saw poor old Frank turn his head aside as though he was ashamed of something. The big duffer! and she so pale and fragile that he might have squeezed the life out of her between his thumb and forefinger. Certes, it was a trying moment.

"If you go, there may be a chance," said he, in a half-hearted sort of fashion—like a man trying to do a disagreeable thing with a certain amount of grace; "if you stay, there is none."

"I will stay," she said.

Glorious was the look of admiration that sparkled in Hayling's eyes. All his soul shone there; all his hopes, it seemed, of earth or heaven. Yet he made no other sign or movement, though to refrain from touching her must have plagued him like a madness. Then he turned to me, and for the first time he seemed irresolute.

"This can't be, Tom," he muttered, savagely. "By God, we're not going to go down like rats."

Being as desperate as he, I told him that I was ready, and together we darted out upon the deck. The ship was already sinking by the head, and in a few minutes at the most she would slip over on her side and disappear.

Hayling bounded forward to the port boat, but only just in time to see the last man slip down the falls and jump aboard. Muttering an oath, he instantly made for the other side, and beheld the starboard boat already putting off. In the stern of this one sat the redoubtable Gupp, the engineer Luiz by his side. As soon as he caught sight of us, for Ethel had followed in our tracks, he waved his hand and shouted goodbye. Frank lifted his rifle ominously, but instantly dropped it. Gupp was in other hands.

"Sorry I can't take you with me," he shouted, "though I might be able to find room for the gal. What do you say, miss? We're a jolly lot of fellows, and we'll treat you well. Look how the ship is going by the head. In two minutes she'll roll over. Quick! what do you say? Will you come with us and live, or stay there and die?"

We all looked down into the boat, each with varied feelings, but none of us spoke.

The man, growing impatient, hurled at us some insulting epithet, and then cried, suddenly, "She's sinking, lads! Pull for your lives!" And away the boat shot into the mist.

I really thought it was the truth he spoke, for the ship gave a perceptible lurch and seemed rapidly to settle down. Fully believing it was my last moment in this world, I turned to give Hayling a final grip, to say goodbye to Ethel. But when I saw her I could not move; for she was kneeling on the hard deck, her face buried in her hands. And I heard her say, "O God, have mercy on us! O Lord, receive our souls!" And Hayling, who stood over her like some dark spirit of death watching with burning eyes, cried out aloud, "Amen, amen!"

CHAPTER XIX

SAVAGES

THE last moment's of one's life are crowded with many things. Standing, as it were, upon the threshold of another world, one naturally struggles to pierce the future. And though, unfortunately, I could not rightly be termed a religious man, the impression of my early training had not been quite obliterated. Upon occasion it is easy enough to speak lightly of death, irreligiously to call upon God, make a mock of hell-fire; but the man of imagination who stands upon the brink of eternity thinks, and Satan himself might pity him the thought.

But, curious to say, the expected did not happen. The ship gave a sudden lurch, and showed a most uncompromising list to port.

Truly, she seemed to be settling, and settling fast ; but after a time it appeared to me that she should have been deeper in the water than she was. I looked, I listened, but could neither see nor hear anything of a forbidding nature. Then I turned to Hayling. He had already left the girl, and was peering down over the side. I touched him on the shoulder, and he looked up.

“ What does it mean, old man ? ”

“ I’m almost afraid to say,” he replied ; “ but I believe she’s stuck fast on a ledge, or in a cradle of some sort.”

“ Then we are saved ? ”

“ Well,” said he, “ if it turns out as I believe, the ship will not sink while this weather holds.”

Which was not quite answering my question in the affirmative, though it was consolatory enough for the occasion. Evil there had been in plenty, so that a little good was welcomed with a throbbing heart. The immediate danger passed, there was hope for the future.

The girl still knelt on the deck, praying devoutly, her face hid in her hands, as if to shut out the sight of death ; but after Hayling had watched for a little time longer he turned

and went to her, and, raising her gently, told her to hope. At first she did not seem to realise that there was even a momentary respite, but stood staring vacantly into his face, like one who hears in a dream. Then, when he had explained to her on what he based his hopes, and led her to the side to see for herself, she leant her face against the rail and cried bitterly. Of course we tried to cheer her up ; but I fear there was nothing very exhilarating either in us or our surroundings.

But as the minutes swept by and brought no change in the position of the ship, we grew gradually more assured of the correctness of Hayling's surmise, and naturally much delighted. If the ship had really sunk down into a cradle, it was quite possible that we might find a comfortable home on her for some time to come, supposing no gale sprang up. Meanwhile we could not be far out of the track of the Australian liners, while there was every chance of a coast boat of some description coming our way. So long as the ship held together, we flattered ourselves that we had got the best of the deal.

After an hour's anxious watching our fears

gradually began to subside. The ship made no sign of moving, and though she was frightfully down at the head, and showed a somewhat unnatural list to port, the inconvenience was forgotten in the joy of our deliverance.

It was pleasant to wander about the deck once more, even though at an acute angle; and though we could not see fifty yards away from us, for the fog had not yet lifted, the awful loneliness was not half so oppressive as might be imagined. The saloon was just as we had left it, the cabins intact; and after we had indulged in a hearty breakfast, a bath and a change of clothes made new creatures of us.

We had now undisputed possession of the ship, and though everything forward was submerged and damaged, we had aft a dry deck and all the necessaries of life; and as such a fate was wholly unexpected, we forgot the horror of our position in gratitude for our preservation.

As the mist did not lift all that day, Hayling had no opportunity of discovering our whereabouts; but he gave it as his opinion that we were stranded on one of the islands somewhere at the head of the Molucca Passage. I confess

I was not much the wiser for all this, though I may as well here admit that he was right. Still, it was gratifying to know that the steamers to and from Port Darwin went through this passage.

That night Ethel slept in her cabin, and I can imagine with what joy the poor girl found herself alone once more. Above deck, Hayling and I took it in turns to watch, and the night passed without occasioning us any alarm.

Towards morning the mist rose, and as the day grew stronger our position gradually began to unfold itself. When Frank came up on deck it was broad daylight, and about a mile away a fair-sized island was discovered, lying low on our starboard bow. Beyond that again, but indistinctly seen, was a still larger island, which lost itself in mist, and which we took to be the mainland. We ourselves had struck upon a small cluster of rocks, so that we loomed up large out of the sea, practically an island in ourselves.

"I wonder if our friend Gupp is over there," he said, pointing to the little island.

I feared he might be, though I devoutly wished he had put out to sea and lost himself in the fog. Anyway, Frank told me to go

forward and have a look, while he would prepare the breakfast. So away I went, and succeeded in clambering on to the bridge, and so into the chart-room, where the captain's glasses hung.

A short survey of the distant shore fully realised my worst anticipations. The boats were distinctly to be seen, beached high and dry; and presently the smoke from a couple of fires curled up against the dark trees. I could not even hope that I was mistaken, and when presently the daylight grew stronger, the men themselves were seen sauntering upon the beach.

This was just a trifle disconcerting, and did away with the hope of ease. They would see us without fail, and in due course we might expect a visit; for a day or two ashore would make them as eager to get back to the *Pulo Way* as they before were eager to leave her.

I clambered down from the bridge, and wending my way to the galley, where I found Hayling frying some bacon and potatoes, let him know of my discovery. But he only said it was a cursed nuisance, his whole attention seeming absorbed in the turning of the potatoes. Yet I thought he wielded his spoon in

an exceedingly savage manner, and slapped the bacon about as though he were patting Mr. Gupp.

Nevertheless we ate heartily of the savoury fry, and drank copiously of the fragrant coffee which Ethel very skilfully brewed.

It was pleasant to see her looking her sweet self again, while the way she sat at the head of the table and served afforded us inexpressible delight. She would also insist upon waiting on us, and after a few vain efforts to save her the fatigue we let her have her way. It was delightful to be free once more, even though cast away upon a cluster of rocks in the Asian Archipelago. The one long night of ease had improved our companion wonderfully, and for fear of checking her joy we did not tell her what I had seen on the adjacent island. No doubt the trouble would come soon enough. Until then she should think only of the sea and the loneliness.

After breakfast Frank and I made our way on deck, Ethel insisting upon tidying up. She said she would be our steward, housekeeper, cook, and maid-of-all-work in one, and knowing she would be happier if doing something, we smilingly agreed to her proposal.

Frank and I in the meantime went forward, and after he had taken a long look at the island, he agreed with me that it was time we prepared ourselves for a possible visit. Gupp and his men were all there, apparently safe and sound, and the odds were that they would put off to us with little delay, for in their hurry to quit the sinking ship they had left all their plunder behind ; so we went aft and began an exhaustive search for arms and ammunition, being just as determined as of old.

I took the port cabins, he the starboard, the result of my researches being a five-chambered revolver and a box of fifty cartridges. He was luckier, for he came across a Martini-Henry and about two dozen rounds of ammunition. The rifle, he told me afterwards, was found in Murrell's room, while Murrell himself lay there dead in his bunk. Remembering whose hand had brought the mate down, it must have been rather a disagreeable adventure for Hayling.

Ethel did not show upon deck until some hour later, and when she did she discovered Frank cleaning the rifles and me sorting the ammunition. A look of alarm swept over her face

as she hurriedly inquired the meaning of these warlike preparations. The big fellow turned to me, and I nodded. Then he looked at the girl closely—a look full of frankness and confidence.

"We have gone through a great deal together," he said, "and Tom and I are only preparing for more."

"For more?" she echoed.

"Perhaps. Why should we attempt to hide anything from our brave little sister? Gupp and the rest of the men are on that island yonder."

She turned instinctively to the land, and though she said no word I saw her lips blanch. Frank handed her his glasses, and she took a long look. When she returned them her hand shook ever so little.

"You saw them?"

"Distinctly. Do you think they will come to us?"

"I think they will try," said he. "The plunder is still aboard."

"Try?" she echoed.

"Well, you see, Tom here is rather a fastidious sort of gentleman, and he has no wish to renew their acquaintance."

She smiled rather wearily, but she understood. Frank pulled hard at his pipe, and put a considerable amount of elbow grease into his rifle-cleaning. I very stupidly recounted my cartridges, and made a feeble attempt to reply to Frank's witticism. The girl turned away, her eyes plainly asking the question, When will this dreadful anxiety cease?

For an hour or so after this we kept a sharp watch on the beach, and then all at once a shot rang out from that quarter. This was followed by two or three more shots, fired in rapid succession. Then, turning our glasses upon the scene, we saw many men rushing about in indescribable confusion; a further look showed us that a horde of savages had descended upon the camp. For a time the crew faced the danger with much courage, giving and taking many knocks; but nevertheless they were rapidly driven back upon the sea, and when more than half of their number had fallen, the others suddenly turned round and fled for the boats at top speed. After them rushed the savages yelling ferociously, their cries even reaching to where we stood.

For a little while now yellow and black seemed mixed in inextricable confusion. Occasionally a desultory shot rang out, but for the rest the fight was a hand-to-hand one, the crew, who had again faced round, contesting every inch of the way. Then, out of the hubbub and confusion a boat was launched, and while a couple of men tugged valiantly at the oars, a big man rose up in the stern and laid about him with a long pole. The man I knew to be Gupp; the pole the mast of the boat. Exciting as it was, I yet had time to admire his courage. It was the dogged determination of his race asserting itself in spite of bad blood and blackguardism. Though I had no love for him, I felt my heart beat with genuine delight as I saw the boat gradually draw away from the land. He had fought a good fight, bad as he was, and may I never breathe again if I didn't duly admire the brute.

But my pleasure in his escape was short-lived, for I saw that he was steering straight towards us; and however much I felt like applauding his valour, I had no wish again to be brought in contact with him. There was really no room for Mr. Gupp aboard the *Pulo*

Way. Still on he came, and in watching him I did not observe that a big canoe had rounded the south-west corner of the island, and was now putting forth every effort to cut off the fugitives. When Hayling drew my attention to this the aforesaid big canoe was coming across at an acute angle, quite a dozen paddles flashing brightly in the sun.

For a minute or so it looked as though Gupp would reach us first, and had his boat been lighter, or his crew stronger, he would have fared better; but his boat was heavy, and his rowers had evidently pulled themselves to pieces in the first quarter of a mile. As a consequence the war canoe gradually overhauled them, and when Gupp saw the hopelessness of his position he turned to us and raised his arms appealingly for help. But even had we been inclined we could not have helped him, and may I be forgiven if I admit that we had not much inclination? Hayling stood there, rifle ready, his face as grim and hard as the block that swung from the adjacent davits. And I know not to this day how he would have acted had the wheel of fortune turned in Gupp's favour.

But this was not to be. Rapidly the big

canoe came up, and when the gunner saw that he had to fight, he once more stood up, the mast in his hand, and waited for the enemy. But the savage, though eager for his prey, had still something of the cunning of the serpent. When within a dozen yards of Gupp he stopped and poured a volley of spears and arrows at that individual, who immediately fell like one stricken dead.

CHAPTER XX

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

THE other two men also appeared to be wounded, for one let his oar drop and fell backward across the thwarts, while his companion doubled forward over his oar and hung inanimate. The canoe drew nearer, and another volley of arrows and spears was discharged into the boat; then some of the savages jumped aboard it and began to hack the dead men. I looked at Hayling, but he shook his head. "Not yet, old man. Wait."

Perhaps it was as well to wait, though there was no chance of the savages overlooking the ship. Indeed, no sooner had the ship's boat been manned and sent shorewards than the war canoe turned its nose our way and advanced rapidly.

"We had better let them come close," said

Hayling, "as we do not want to miss. Where is Ethel?"

"Here," she said, advancing from behind a ventilator.

"Hadn't you better go below?"

"Why should I?"

"You might get hit."

"Why should you think I am so great a coward?"

"I know you are not a coward, but I don't want you to risk anything."

"But I want to stay—Frank."

"All right," he muttered, "only, for God's sake, get the other side of the ship."

Away she went and stood behind the lee side of the deck-house, while he and I took up our position opposite, each with his rifle ready, and a revolver handy in case of emergencies.

The big canoe was now not more than a hundred yards away, and from our hiding-places we could see the look of wonder on the hideous faces of the savages as they stared up at the great vessel—for great she must have seemed to them. Then one, who was evidently a chief, rose and began to talk loudly, and to gesticulate fiercely, and many voices echoed

him in the same shrill, nervous key. The paddles were set going once more, and the canoe forged ahead.

Just then Hayling muttered in his slow, calm way, "Now, then, Tom, let the beggars have it. I'll take the chap in the feathers."

As with one voice the two rifles spoke, and the "chap in the feathers" threw up his arms, swayed to one side and fell overboard; the man beside him fell back in the arms of the man behind.

For some seconds confusion and consternation reigned aboard that craft; there were many strange cries, and a hurried scramble to get back. Then, maddened with fear and rage, the fighting-men poured a volley of arrows at us, or rather at the ship, many of which rang sharply on our sides. Us they did not see, and this, I think, added somewhat to the rout which followed; for after they had fired we sent two more shots into their midst, which completed their terror. Not daring to advance further, and having no notion of the strength of the enemy, they quickly placed themselves beyond the reach of harm. Nor could I resist sending a shot after them, even when they were five hundred yards away.

Though the bullet splashed some yards astern, it produced such an effect that they redoubled their assiduity at the paddles, nor did they stop till they had run the canoe ashore.

"Well, Ethel," said Frank, turning to her with a smile, "what do you think of your dusky brother?"

"He's perfectly hideous."

"He's not an Adonis," Frank admitted gravely, as he pulled out his pipe and began to fill it. "It is curious, Tom," he went on, "but I believe a woman about to be hanged would steal one of her last moments to criticise the hangman's appearance."

Ethel, being in any but a humorous mood, smiled faintly.

"Do you think they will come back?" she said.

He looked at her between the long puffs. "And if they do?"

She looked straight back at him, and answered, with a flush, "Why, we shall be ready for them, of course."

He smiled quietly, and patted the little hand that rested on the rail. That was all. But her face grew suddenly red, and her eyelids quivered suspiciously. Hayling turned

away and fumbled with the breach of his gun. Big Hayling with his big heart and his big hands : and all because a girl's eyelashes drooped and trembled.

During the rest of that day we suffered no further molestation. Indeed, some time after noon the big canoe disappeared round the south-west corner of the island, while the savages themselves melted from the beach into the bush beyond. I think both Hayling and I construed this in our own way, but as each seemed to guess that the other's thoughts were none too pleasant, no inquiries were made respecting them. We ate a hearty dinner instead, and saw to our arms in our own secretive way.

That night the beach was literally ablaze with many fires, and we saw distinctly the naked savages dancing round the flames. It wanted not Hayling's whispered word of "cannibals" to tell me what it meant ; but I could not help thinking of the awful vengeance of God on those who had so violently outraged His laws.

Gradually the fires burnt out ; the orgies ceased, and the long night dragged itself slowly towards the day.

With the dawn came a further disagreeable surprise, the light showing us the beach thick with savages, while quite a dozen big canoes floated just outside the surf. I turned inquiringly to Hayling, and he answered with a reckless little laugh. The deuce take him ! I moved away, feeling absolutely sick of this long, worrying struggle for life. It seemed to me as though Fate took a fiendish delight in throwing obstacles in our path. Danger had succeeded danger with a rapidity bewildering to one who had no taste for fire-eating and heroics ; and now this minx, Fate, was about to crown her devilry with the most devilish work of all. For there could be no doubt the savages were preparing to attack us, and little doubt as to the result of the encounter. Roughly speaking, there must have been over a hundred of them, and a dozen war canoes. The odds were ridiculous. I smiled grimly to myself, somewhat, I think, after the manner of Hayling.

We were not long left wondering when the attack would begin ; for as soon as the sun was fairly up the savages swam or waded out to the canoes and scrambled aboard. Then, amid a chanting of war-songs and a beating of

tom-toms, the whole flotilla came skipping towards us.

I am not going to say we three were not scared, though incessant danger had of late rather hardened us. Still, speaking for myself, I did not prance, like the Biblical war-horse, at the smell of battle. Indeed, I wished myself far enough away—even back on my old stool in the office of Messrs. Latheson. But for all that I meant to do my duty, though the phrase smacks somewhat of the theatre. Fact is, we were in a deuce of a hole, and the desperate case made us stiffen our backs.

Hayling was a silent beggar, who rarely showed his feelings; but if I read him aright his wish to live could not have been less acute than mine. Indeed, when he looked at a certain person, hurrying shades of perplexity swept his face, while the furrow between his eyebrows cut deeply into his head. Whenever I saw those compressed eyebrows, that perplexed look, I knew of whom he was thinking.

Poor Ethel made no foolish attempt to conceal her fear. She frankly owned that she was in great terror, but beyond the mere expression of her fears she did not go. It is natural for a woman to talk, and when she has made

a bit of a fuss she rapidly cools down. So we gravely listened to her fears, and when she had finished, feeling greatly relieved, she ran off to prepare the breakfast, apparently oblivious of the fact that without a little luck we should probably make a breakfast for our dusky brothers.

The flotilla making for our starboard side, Hayling and I took up our position at that point, keeping as low down behind the bulwarks as possible. As before, seeing no one on deck, the savages stopped and began to gesticulate and to jabber noisily; but for a time they thought before they ventured to approach us closer. Then they opened their line and came onward very slowly. Hayling let the first canoe come to within a hundred yards before he spoke. Then he just turned round and gripped me by the hand, saying, "Tom, this is a devil of a go." I admitted as much—it was a devil of a go; but I felt his fingers curl round mine, and I knew I was going to make the best of it.

We were the first to open the engagement, a shot from Hayling laying out a big fellow, who seemed to be the leader of the foremost canoe. At any rate, he jabbered and carried on

to such an extent that he made a good target of himself. Moreover, the fellow wore Gupp's coat, and that was a bit of bravado that required payment.

Dire consternation followed the first shot, and great confusion prevailed aboard the forward boats ; but this very soon gave way to anger, and a shower of arrows was despatched against us, their hard heads clattering upon the sides, and in several instances sticking in the woodwork of the deck-house. But we had excellent cover, and firing rapidly disconcerted them somewhat.

For a time the battle raged much to our advantage ; but three or four of the canoes, seeing the error of their ways, drew off from the main body, and we who could not be in several places at once felt much perturbed in consequence. But I darted from side to side, now giving a shot here, a shot there, while Hayling lounged against one of the stokehole ventilators, and with the utmost calmness seized every opportunity to lessen the number of the enemy.

Great was the excitement in the boats, the cries of rage and terror being such as I hope I may never hear again. Sometimes in their

madness they came within a dozen yards of us, but the deadly, methodical crack, crack of the rifles set them back-watering as hard as they could go. While they made a target of themselves it was all well and good; but it was from another source we apprehended danger, and not having the gift of ubiquity, we were suddenly sore beset.

Under cover of a fusillade from the star-board side, two separate attempts were made to board us on the port; and we happened to look round just in time to see some ragged heads bobbing over the bulwarks.

As if set in motion by the same spring, Frank and I darted across to repel the boarders, and a short hand-to-hand scuffle ensued, in which I got a spear-thrust in the thigh, and he a grazing of the head; but we used our revolvers to some purpose, and then drove the savages over the side with the butt of the gun.

This task completed, another and a more formidable one awaited us forward. That part of the ship being low down in the water offered exceptional facilities for boarding, and the watchful enemy, taking advantage of our little engagement on the port side, swarmed up

over the bows in great numbers. As we turned to face them we must have encountered thirty men, while every moment the number was augmented. To charge them would have been sheer folly, for as they were all fully armed we should have been speared or shot before we got within a dozen yards of them.

"There's nothing for it but the wheel-house," I said; and as I spoke I stole a glance aft and caught sight of Ethel's skirts fluttering from the companion-way. "The wheel-house!" I shouted. "Run!"

"Ethel?"

"Yes."

"Then let us give them one and run."

My instinct told me that the girl had already acted on my suggestion; so together Frank and I raised our revolvers, and emptied them into the howling throng, who set up a horrible shrieking and stumbled back in confusion. This was the moment we seized for our retreat, and though my thigh was extremely painful and bled much, I have no hesitation in saying that I covered the distance with remarkable agility. Ethel was waiting with the door on the swing, and as we passed through she swung it to. And only just in time, for

the spears rattled upon it, some even forcing their sharp heads through the shattered panels.

Quick as lightning we jammed home some cartridges, and through the aperture opened a fusillade which quickly drove the wretches to seek cover, and which gave us an opportunity once more to load our rifles. Then, feeling a bit spent, we opened a bottle of wine and drank deeply, and I could not help smiling to myself as I thought of poor Ethel's breakfast.

Well, here we were back in our old stronghold, and much as I welcomed the shelter I deplored the necessity of having to seek it. Hayling seemed very comfortable, and watched and chewed biscuits at the same time. We hadn't much to say to each other, and, truth to confess, I had no stomach for eating.

Of course we took a shot every chance we got, but for some time the enemy was very wary. Then, growing desperate, they advanced in a formidable body, and attacked us with a vengeance. Indeed, they seemed to fear us nothing, and came so close that for corner work our arms were unavailing. It was a terribly exciting moment, and we fired briskly; but when it was all over, and the enemy had

again retreated, the smell of smoke blew across the aperture and entered the wheel-house. I looked at Hayling, and he looked at me. But there was no mistaking its meaning. The savages had set fire to the house, and I knew that in its present splintered condition it would burn like matchwood.

Again I looked at Frank, but he was muttering darkly beneath his breath. I had not the courage to turn to Ethel. Indeed, I hoped she did not know, though know she must, and that very quickly. In fact, even as I thought, the low crackling of the woodwork reached me. She stirred and came towards us.

“What noise was that, Frank?”

“Noise, dear?” he repeated weakly.

“It was like the crackling of wood. Oh,” as a whiff of the pungent smoke came through the window, “they have set fire to the ship!”

“Yes, I must go and put it out.”

“But they will kill you!”

He shrugged his shoulders. It was all one, anyway.

Then he arose, and was about to open the door, when suddenly he stopped. Coming back to the window, and putting his hand

to his ear, he listened intently. Then we all heard a noise like the distant sound of a fog-horn. In a second or so it came again, this time clearer.

"A steamer!" said Frank; and he turned and took the girl's hand in his.

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!"

The fire meantime had caught well, and the crackling of the flames was now louder and angrier than ever. But above it all came the hoarse roar of the whistle, and we knew that we were seen, and that the ship was bearing down on us.

But the wheel-house was rapidly filling with smoke, and the fire had already licked its way through the damaged panel of the door. So without more ado Frank rushed out, an old bit of sailcloth in his hand, while I stood at the window, prepared to shoot on sight. But the enemy gave no sign of their presence, and presently Hayling poked his head in, crying, "Come out. They're gone."

And gone they were. As we stepped out on to the deck, we saw the canoes making for the island as fast as they could go, while upon the other side of us lay a big steamer, not more than a mile away. I gripped Hayling by both

hands, which were blackened and burnt with the fire, and his hard face broke into a happy smile. Ethel leant on the rail, and burying her face in her arms, wept for joy.

CHAPTER XXI

PORT AT LAST

FRANK went over to her, and gently laying his hand on her shoulder, said—

“Cheer up, little sister. It’s all right now.”

And she looked up at him, laughing and crying at the same time; and I saw something more than laughter and tears in her eyes—something I would have given much to see in her face as she looked at me. I was not envious or jealous of Hayling’s great good fortune, but I felt singularly sad and lonesome, and turned away, not as thankful as I should have been for our deliverance.

But in the meantime a boat had been lowered from the steamer, and presently it came dancing over the waters towards us. In the stern sat an officer in uniform; the boat was rowed by four men, while two others with

rifles in their hands knelt in the bows. They came to within thirty yards or so of us, and then lay to.

"Ship, ahoy!" bellowed the officer, in good round, solid English.

"Ahoy!" shouted Hayling, clambering up on to the bulwarks.

"What ship are you?"

"The *Pulo Way*."

The officer turned to his men and said something. Then looking up at us he said suspiciously—

"Why have you painted out your name?"

"It's a long story," said Frank. "If you'll come along side we'll be much obliged."

"How many are you?"

"Three. We have a lady with us—a passenger by the *Chung-Tong*."

"The *Chung-Tong* went down in a typhoon off the Philippines," said the officer incredulously.

"That, too, is a long story," said Hayling. "Will you kindly come along side and take us off?"

Without more ado the boat came alongside. Frank threw a rope over, and the young officer clambered up on deck. He looked us curiously

up and down; and no doubt an odd trio we seemed. Hayling and I dirty, bearded; he with a clot of blood on the side of his face; I with my trousers ripped open at the thigh, and the bandage, bloodstained and dirty, showing through. Even Ethel showed few traces of her real beauty.

"My scissors!" said the young fellow, "you seem to have been in the wars."

"Slightly," said Frank.

Well, after getting our things together, we left the *Pulo Way* there on the rocks, and were taken aboard the steamer, which proved to be the *Chang-Chuen*, bound from Hong Kong to Port Darwin and Sydney. Indeed, she was a sister ship of the *Chung-Tong*, and belonged to the same line. As may be supposed, our story caused considerable sensation on board, where it was believed that the *Chung-Tong* and the *Pulo Way* had gone down in a typhoon which had raged shortly after we had sailed from Hong Kong, the tail of which we had met while somewhere off Manila.

After he had heard our story, the captain of the *Chang-Chuen* sent a couple of boats off to the *Pulo Way*, and a thorough examination was made of her. Her papers were brought

off, and many other things of value, including the gold which Macshiel and his companions had risked so much to gain. But an examination of the vessel showed her position to be so precarious that the first gale would send her to the bottom.

Ethel, now looking another girl in some clothes which a lady passenger kindly lent her, stood with Frank and I in the stern of the *Chang-Chuen* as the ship steamed away to the southward. We did not say much, but we watched the outline of the *Pulo Way* grow less and less, until at last nothing but her little sticks of masts were visible. It was curious, but I didn't half like leaving her there by herself in the drear loneliness of the sea. It was a foolish fancy, perhaps, but I know it was one that was shared by my companions. After all, bad as she was, she had been a good friend to us. True, we had suffered much, but we had also loved much. Sorrow, danger, and ever-threatening death had been ours; but on board of her we three strangers had met and learned to love each other, and that love was worth the price we had paid for it.

And so we gazed at the poor old *Pulo Way* until she sank down into the sea; and long

after she had vanished we watched the spot, just as one watches the vacant chair of the dead.

"Well, Ethel," said Frank, "that is the last of the *Pulo Way*. Are you glad?"

To my surprise, and yet not to my surprise, she answered, "No."

"Oh, the contradiction of woman!" he laughed. But I saw by his eyes that he understood her, just as I did. Certes! but at that moment we all loved the wretched old tub.

That night, an hour or so after dinner, as I leant against the mizzen stays watching the phosphorescent water bubble, and thinking in a vague, dreamy way of the past, I suddenly became aware of two persons on the other side of the rigging. They spoke in a low, earnest voice; but presently I heard the man say, "I could not speak before; I dared not. But now that you are free, now that you are once more your own mistress?"

What her reply was I could not catch; but the man answered, "My dearest, oh, my dearest!" Needless to say that man was Hayling. The girl was—would it be very difficult to guess?

When he joined me, an hour later, he told me of his good fortune as we walked up and down the deck together, and I was glad of the night; but in all sincerity I wrung him warmly by the hand, and wished him God on his side. I knew how it would be, how it must be; and I loved them both with all my soul.

Well, in due time we reached Sydney, and there the big Australian married his Lady of the Sea, and a grand, proud pair they looked as they walked down the church together. As was natural, he who admired them most was he who loved them most. But Ethel, being a woman of property, was almost immediately called by cable to England, and away they went together, she and her big husband, and with them went happiness shining like the sun.

I took the first ship back to Hong Kong, where I had long since been given up as dead. Messrs. Latheson, to show their appreciation of divine protection, raised my salary twenty dollars a month; but my friends the Haylings want me to go to London, where they are people of some condition. They hint at the management of a certain bank in the City;

and their appeals usually end in this fashion :
 " For the sake of auld lang syne, and the love
 we bore each other, and the battles we fought
 together on board the *Pulo Way*."

THE END.

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